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THE PHILADELPHIAN.

VOL. III.

THE PHILADELPHIAN

BY

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'THE MILLIONAIRE,' 'FIELD PATHS,' 'RAMBLES AMONG THE HILLS,'
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE PHILADELPHIAN.

CHAPTER I.

IS HE GUILTY?

MRS. CLAVERING had lost no time in establishing herself in Paris, where she managed to shake off, at least temporarily, the depression and nervous fear which had weighed so heavily upon her during the last few days at Porthcawl. She had the invaluable gift of throwing troubles from her almost instinctively. Some women, and a very few men, are so endowed, and greatly are they to be envied,

for the inevitable storms which come crushing past, engulfing so many others, sweep harmlessly over their heads.

Mrs. Clavering's survey of her position was not, in truth, of a nature to cause serious discontent. Here she was, in the city she liked best, with sufficient means to permit of entire independence, unimpaired in health, with her good looks so wonderfully little affected by time that she was able to ignore her real age, and almost anything else which she did not wish to remember. The one bitter drop in the cup had been dropped there by her son, and that was potent enough to flavour the whole draught. Still, she managed to enjoy her life very fairly, and was beginning to hope that her old anxieties were needless. Then one day she heard that Rufus Snapper was in Paris, and somehow her disquietude returned. She knew that he

would soon call upon her, and she was not disappointed or surprised when he made his appearance. But she felt a presentiment that the evil which she had dreaded was drawing nearer, and ever more near, and that the time had come when she must summon up all her courage to meet it.

‘I have been longing to see you, Mr. Snapper,’ she said, in a low earnest tone, ‘ever since I heard you were here. The fact is, I want your advice on a subject we have already had some talk about.’

She had made up her mind on the instant to go at once into the very midst of the fire.

Snapper nodded his head, but said nothing. The widow drew her chair close to him, and continued in the same subdued tone.

‘It is about my most unhappy son ! He has written to me again—the only sort of

letter he ever sends now. It is a demand for money. That I am used to, but he frightens me by saying that he is in great danger, and that, if I do not assist him, I shall be sure to repent it to the last day of my life. You know him, Mr. Snapper, better, I fear, than I do. Tell me, is it true that he is in any danger of this kind?’

Her face was pale; in spite of her resolution to play her game steadfastly, she could not altogether conceal her uneasiness.

‘He is in difficulties—Sam Rafferty always is,’ replied Snapper, apparently pondering over every word he uttered. ‘You cannot be ignorant of his position?’

‘You mean his pecuniary position? Oh, yes, I know all about that;’ and a look of some impatience passed across the widow’s face. ‘But is that all? Is there nothing else?’

‘I cannot say there is not. He has been in bad hands, and he has compromised himself seriously—of that there is no doubt.’

‘With whom?’

‘Well, with a man named Finch, to name only one. They have raised money together in a way which the law does not exactly approve of. Perhaps he referred to that when he wrote to you.’

The Philadelphian watched the lady closely, and he saw the tears start to her eyes. Once more he could not restrain a feeling of sympathy for her.

‘Is there anything—anything else?’

She evidently forced herself to ask this question, and her hand trembled as she laid it timidly upon Snapper’s arm.

‘I wish you would find out all about him from somebody else,’ replied Snapper, uneasily.

‘ But there is no one else—and although you have never professed any great friendship for my son, yet I am sure you would not willingly inflict a cruel blow upon his mother. Think how helpless I am—how wretched! You will have some pity upon me?’

‘ Why, madame, what have I to do with it, and what can I do?’

‘ You can save my son even now, and I doubt whether there is anyone else in the world who can. It would be a good deed—do not doubt that. I know that I have no claim upon you, except that of a most miserable mother. Think what I have suffered for years past, and what my sufferings must be now. Why does he not go away!’

These last words seemed to have fallen from her lips almost involuntarily, and a glance passed between the two which

revealed to both that the secret cause of the mother's dread was no longer a secret.

‘If you would but tell me all!’

She clasped her hands together, and Snapper felt that he could not disregard the appeal.

‘It is not a pleasant thing,’ he said, presently, ‘to give a mother such an account of her son as I should have to give you, if I told you all.’

‘Unfortunately, I know so much already! You cannot add much to my grief.’

‘You know something, and you suspect more. Is that so?’

‘It is,’ she answered, in a broken voice.

‘But it may only be suspicion—remember that. Even I—at present I have no proof.’

‘Thank God for that!’ she broke out, impetuously.

‘But everything looks bad, I cannot deceive you on that point. Are we to talk openly and without reserve? Is that your wish?’

‘It is—let me hear the very worst.’

‘Then let me ask you one question. Was your son at Porthcawl Castle on the night of your husband’s murder?’

There was no flinching in the widow’s eyes, and no hesitation in her tone, as she answered,

‘He was not—I am as sure of it as I am that I live. Besides, he would have done no injury to my husband—why should he?’

‘Consider: a man in difficulties, hard pressed for money, believing that the poor old squire’s death would make him rich. Urged on, perhaps, by evil and desperate

counsellors to commit any crime! And then, more than once he was heard to threaten Roland Clavering. I myself heard him say, "The sooner the squire is out of the way, the better."'

'You heard him say that!' exclaimed the mother, gasping for breath.

She remembered but too well the occasion on which these words were uttered, and she recalled her fears at the time that Mr. Snapper had possibly overheard them. What construction could he place upon them except that which she had been forced, in her inmost heart, to give?

'I heard him,' replied Snapper,—'he spoke loud enough to be heard at the house itself. You must recollect the evening?'

'There was something of the kind said,' acknowledged the widow, too much agitated now to attempt denial. 'But surely you attached no importance to his words?'

‘Not then, perhaps; but I did afterwards. I did not understand at that moment as much as I do now. Your son thought you were sure to come in for all the property except the land, and never doubted that you would give him as much as he wanted. It is quite clear that he kept on nursing the idea that, if the squire could only be got out of the way, all his difficulties would be over, until at last——’ the Philadelphian paused, and looked down.

‘Do you mean to say,’ asked the widow, with a great effort to be calm, ‘that you really believe my son had anything to do with this frightful crime?’

‘What am I to believe? I heard him use those words. Did they mean nothing? Do you suppose a magistrate would say so?’

‘A magistrate! You are not going to

betray him? That he has been a bad son to me I know, but I cannot believe that he is a murderer. Why, why does he not go away !'

Her face was very pale, and there were tears in her voice, if not in her eyes.

'Why do you wish that so much?'

'Can you ask me? Because of these dark suspicions which rest upon him. He is innocent, but have not innocent men suffered cruel wrong before now?'

'If he is innocent, he will be able to prove it. The police know very little as yet—too little to justify them in interfering with anyone. But I should not advise your son to attempt to run away.'

'Have you said anything to him?'

The widow had now risen to her feet, and Snapper could see that she had decided on some sudden course of action.

‘Not at present. I suspect that he knows more than I can tell him.’

‘But he must know what you think of him, at any rate—you are his *friend*,’ added Mrs. Clavering, bitterly. ‘After what you have said, something must be done. I will go to him, and at once. I will start to-night—it is better that he should not come here?’

The last words were apparently intended to sound the American, and he shook his head.

‘I should not recommend him to leave Birmingham just now,’ he said.

‘I will find out the truth now that it has come to this,’ replied the mother, firmly. ‘Will you suspend your judgment till then?’

‘I will try.’

‘And you will take no step against him till you have heard from me?’

‘I shall be here for several days, with my friends Colonel Pendleton and his daughter. They came with me. You are aware of that?’

Snapper was curious to ascertain if the widow had heard of the scene at Porthcawl Castle, but her manner satisfied him that she had not.

‘I have not heard anything of them since I left England,’ she said, wearily. ‘I little thought I should have to go back again so soon. But it must be done. I will make my son’s innocence clear—even to you.’

She spoke resolutely enough while Snapper was in the room, but no sooner had he gone than her fortitude forsook her, and she fell into a chair, weak and trembling. Too many circumstances occurred to her mind which tended to fix terrible suspicion upon her son. If she could now get

him out of England ! That was her one idea ; and yet she could not altogether abandon the hope that this dire necessity for actual flight—the flight of a guilty man—might not be necessary. Her son had compromised himself gravely, perhaps—but she found it impossible to believe, fully and without doubt, that he was an assassin. She must see him, that was evident, and, almost before Snapper had reached his hotel, she had begun to make preparations for her journey.

The Philadelphian found the colonel waiting for him, and they looked at each other rather anxiously, for different reasons. It required no very keen eye to see that a change had come over the colonel of late—he was more anxious than usual, and he seemed suddenly to have grown ten years older.

‘So you have seen her,’ said the Vir-

ginian, endeavouring to cast aside the depression which hung over him, 'and she has sent you away earlier than usual. So much the better for us. Edith will be very glad to hear you have come back—she wants to go and look at some pictures, and I am but a poor hand at that sort of work. Between ourselves, my head is rather bad—that old sword-cut is giving me trouble again.'

'I wish it were only the sword-cut,' said Snapper, gravely; but the colonel merely looked up and smiled.

They were both silent for a few minutes, and then the Philadelphian looked round the room and asked for Edith.

'She is well,' said the colonel; 'at least she always tells me that she is. But I fancy she is growing thin and pale, and her strength is not so good as it was.'

'Paris does not suit her,' said Snapper,

making light of it, 'though she is an American.'

'It is not that. She is delicate, as her mother was, and any shock or trouble would be a great blow to her. I have always tried to keep her from anything of the kind, but we have so little power over each other's lives! This has come upon her in spite of me.'

'You think she feels it very much?' said Snapper, looking hard at his friend.

'I did not at first, but of late she has been declining more and more in spirits. Surely you have noticed that?'

'I have noticed that she is not the same as she used to be, but, after all, we could not keep her always like that. She is a woman now, and we have gone on looking upon her as a child.'

'Yes—that is what I told Geoffrey Clavering. It came upon me all at once

that day. I have been much to blame—I see it now. But they were brought up together, and you know how time flies. I forgot that they were no longer children.’

‘You think she loves Geoffrey?’ Snapper’s voice had sunk almost to a whisper, and there was a look of pain in his face which the colonel had scarcely ever seen there before.

‘I do not know what to think—she would sit alone for hours, musing, if one would let her. To her, it is like a great tragedy. But I shall always believe that Geoffrey meant no wrong. He was entrapped into this wretched marriage when Edith was only fifteen, and he himself was only eighteen—remember that! Then, soon after the marriage, they separated, and I suppose shame alone would have kept Geoffrey from revealing his secret. He,

too, has been to blame, but I am sorry for him all the same. It is one of the most hopeless cases in life; there is absolutely nothing to be done to help anybody. Sometimes, Rufus, I think the best thing we can do is to go back home, and see how things are going on in poor broken-down old Virginia. My house is still there in the valley, and very often of late I have longed to get back to it. A man must have a country as well as food and raiment; without it, he is only half clad, as it were. I am pining for Dixie again.'

'Don't think of it,' said Snapper, much troubled; 'it would be hard for me to say good-bye to you now, after all these years.'

'Why should you? There are no tar and feathers now even for an old abolition-

ist like yourself. Some of my old slaves are still about my place—they would not go away. But you would not mind them, and they would not hurt *you!*'

'Are you seriously thinking of this?'

'Very seriously—but you need not look so downcast. To begin with, we cannot go just yet. To tell the truth, I am not disposed to leave unexplained that mystery of the death of my poor friend, Roland Clavering. I should like to see it cleared up.'

'And so you shall,' responded Snapper, eagerly, 'if you will only get this new plan out of our head. I am convinced I am on the track of the murderer.'

'That fellow Rafferty?'

'The same. And what is just as important,' added Snapper, again lowering his voice, 'I shall be able, I think, to bring

something to light about that woman, Mrs. Martin, too.'

'Geoffrey's wife!' exclaimed the colonel, now keenly interested.

'Just so—but recollect the name she always goes by. Now who was *Mr.* Martin? There must have been some one, I suppose, who owned to that name, or who found it convenient to assume it. That woman has been married more than once, I am morally sure. Was Geoffrey the first husband? I doubt it.'

'But have you anything to go upon?'

'Plenty—but not so much as I should like to have. The whole affair, so far as Geoffrey was concerned, was a fraud planned by Finch. I know enough to be able to prove that. But about this Mr. Martin—that is the man I want to find. Suppose, in my present hunt, I should

bring down both birds with one shot?’

The colonel looked intently at his friend and seemed to divine his meaning, as he often did. But he turned away as if disappointed.

‘You are wrong about Rafferty,’ said he.

‘We shall see,’ replied Snapper, briskly. ‘Give me another month, and the murderer will be in gaol.’

‘Perhaps he will,’ replied the colonel, in a tone which puzzled his friend, ‘but in that case you will not have the man you are thinking of now.’

‘I will have him for something,’ rejoined Snapper, ‘if it is only for being in that forgery. He has led me a pretty long dance, but I shall catch up to him yet. And, meanwhile, you will not go back to Virginia?’

‘Not till one of us proves to be wrong,’

said the colonel, holding out his hand.

‘It is a bargain ! Now let us take Edith to the pictures, and say not a word of all this before her !’

CHAPTER II.

MRS. CLAVERING RETURNS DISAPPOINTED.

SAM RAFFERTY expected his mother, and made his usual preparations to receive a visitor—that is to say, he added an extra glass or two of whisky to his ordinary morning's allowance, and felt almost as much elated as he did on the pleasant day when he went to 'tackle' the squire, now lying in his grave. He had a vague idea that the object of his mother's visit was in some way connected with the squire's death, and this at first made him uncom-

fortable. But when he met Mrs. Clavering on the platform of the railway-station at Birmingham in obedience to her telegram, he was quite cheerful again—almost too cheerful for the severer tastes of the widow, who could not help thinking, as she looked at him,

‘What a pity that he takes so much after his father instead of me!’

Sam was in hopes that his mother would propose holding the conference at an hotel, with a little mild refreshment thrown in, according to Mr. Snapper’s most approved good fashion; but, much to his disappointment, she insisted on going to his lodgings. This she had never done before, and Sam felt much aggrieved.

‘You will not find my lodgings to your mind, I dare say,’ he said, when they were in the cab. ‘They will not remind you of Porthcawl Castle.’

‘Unfortunately, I need nothing to remind me of that.’

There was not much in the words, but she accompanied them with a look which made Sam feel uneasy.

‘How much does she know?’ he asked himself. ‘Something, or she would not be here. That rascal, Finch, has been writing to her, I suppose, every other dodge being about played out with him. Well, we shall soon hear all about it.’

He smiled pleasantly, but not another word was exchanged between them until they reached their destination, when he jumped out of the cab, and led the widow to his two rooms, opening one into the other. They were small, and rather stuffy, but the widow knew that she had given Sam money enough to enable him to live in the best part of the town, and the rest was his own affair.

‘Are you living here alone?’ she asked, as she sat herself in Sam’s easy-chair, with a look of disgust at the strong flavour of stale tobacco which filled the place.

‘My friend Pat Daly has the other rooms in the house. We used to board together.’

‘One of your interesting companions?’

‘The most interesting of all, especially just now. I owe him some money, and don’t see how I am to pay it.’

‘I see you have nothing very new to tell me. As for this man, Daly, you will be sorry you placed yourself in his power, mark my words!’

‘I am sorry now,’ replied Sam, jauntily, ‘but what am I to do? I can’t pay unless I have the money.’

‘And I do not intend to give you the money, so there’s an end of that. I told you long ago that I would pay no more of

your debts. Daly is a very dangerous man,' she went on, with a sharp look at her son. 'Your other dear friend, Mr. Snapper, warned me against him long ago.'

'Oh, he did? Well, what had he got to say against Pat Daly? He pretends to be mighty friendly with him whenever he comes here. If he is playing any double trick with Daly—or with me either—he will find himself in the wrong box!'

Sam spoke up in a valiant manner, but it only brought a sad smile to the lips of his mother.

'At present,' she said, 'you need not trouble yourself about Mr. Snapper's safety. Suppose you think a little of your own.'

Her tone was so peculiar that her son could not help being a little disconcerted at it.

'Why, what's the matter with you to-

day, mother?' he said. 'Have you come all the way from Paris to talk in riddles? What have I to be afraid of, I should like to know?'

The widow looked searchingly at him, and, seeing his bold front, a gleam of hope shot across her mind. He could not be guilty. A spendthrift—hard, callous, vulgar in his tastes and habits, all this he might be—but surely he was incapable of committing the awful crime which the Philadelphian was ready to lay to his charge.

'I hope you have no reason to be afraid of anything, Sam,' she said, in a gentler voice; 'but I have been hearing strange things said of you, and they make me thoroughly unhappy. It is not the first time by a good many that I have been made so on your account.'

There was a look of sorrow in her face

which would have moved anyone but her son. He was entirely unconcerned.

‘How can I help it,’ he said, with a laugh, ‘when you always make such a fuss about trifles? Anyone would think from the way you serve me that I was not your son at all. Look at the line you took after old Mr. Clavering died! You went off without saying a word, or sending me a shilling. The night I was at Porthcawl—in that infernal summer-house, or whatever you call it—you left me without a penny. I shouldn’t have been able even to get back to London but for the friend who went down with me.’

‘There was a friend with you then, too, was there?’

‘Yes, there was—no harm in that, I hope? A *male* friend, you understand—it wasn’t my wife, although you insisted I was married.’

‘I was led to believe you were.’

‘They lead you to believe anything about me,’ replied Sam, in a deeply injured tone. ‘I think if they told you I had committed a burglary—or——’ Sam hesitated for a moment, and then jerked out the word—‘or a *murder*, you would believe it.’

The mother started, and cast a half-frightened look at her son, and held up her hand in an appealing sort of way. But he did not seem to notice her.

‘You always condemn me unheard,’ he continued, ‘and leave me in the lurch, looking like a fool, as you did that night at Porthcawl. Or else you cut me adrift altogether, as you have done lately. I suppose you thought I wanted the old squire’s money? I would have died rather than take it.’

Sam’s noble independence of character

had never so struck his mother before.

‘There was very little money left to me, Sam, by my poor husband; you must have heard of that. Mr. Clavering’s death was a most unfortunate thing for me in every way. I am quite sure that he meant to have altered his will—he told me as much. With anything like what I had a claim to, there would have been enough for both of us for life. As it is——’

‘There is only enough for one,’ interrupted Sam, impatiently. ‘Very well. That is no reason why you should cut me altogether. I have not even seen you since you walked off and left me in that beastly summer-house. I suppose you have forgotten all about that?’

‘I wish I *could* forget all about it,’ said the widow, sighing. ‘Are you aware that Mr. Rufus Snapper heard a good deal of what you said that night?’

‘ Well, what of it? He was welcome to hear it all, so far as I am concerned. You seem to think a good deal of this Mr. Snapper. Surely it can’t be——’ Sam had stopped short as if a sudden thought had struck him, and he went up close to his mother, looking hard in her face— ‘you are not thinking of *marrying* again, are you? Is that what you have come to tell me to-day?’

Mrs. Clavering could not help a smile stealing over her face. The suggestion that she might marry again was not unflattering, although it only came from her own son.

‘ No, Sam,’ said she, ‘you need not be afraid of that. And, if I were to marry again, I should not choose Rufus Snapper,’ —a little shiver seemed to run through her as she spoke. ‘He is a man I have always dreaded, and with good reason!’

Mind what I tell you—he can never be a true friend to either of us. I believe that he has only sought your acquaintance to do you harm, and that you will yet rue the day when you first set eyes upon his face.’

‘That’s another of your silly prejudices, mother,’ replied Sam, snapping his fingers. ‘Rufus is a very good fellow, and he knew my father, didn’t he? That’s something in his favour.’

‘Has he ever talked to you about your father?’

‘Sometimes. I suppose he did not know much about him?’

‘Not much,’ replied the widow, faintly.

She felt very confident that the Philadelphian had not thought proper to communicate what he knew to Sam Rafferty—that was the only point which concerned her.

‘Well, we needn’t talk about Mr. Snapper.’

‘No, nor about that other friend of yours, Mr. Finch, I suppose,’ said the widow, gradually drawing near the subject which filled her mind. ‘I recollect your saying something about him the last time you favoured me with a visit. You were in his power, and very dreadful things were to happen—you remember all that? You told your tale so well that I almost believed it—for once! A good many weeks have passed, and you are not in prison, or anything of that kind.’

‘No, not yet,’ replied Sam, whose face had fallen considerably.

‘Well, anyone who had heard you that night would have fancied you were almost in terror of your life.’ She spoke in a half-bantering tone, but she was all the time

keeping a very close and observant eye upon her son. 'I suppose you will admit now that it was all a trick? It was not the first you have played upon your unhappy mother.'

'A trick?' repeated Sam, in a gloomy tone. 'Well, have it so, if you like. Some of these days you will find out whether I told you the truth or not. Don't ever say I deceived you about *this* matter, at any rate.'

'What am I to find out?'

'We won't talk about it any more,' replied Sam, with a martyr-like air. 'I shall have to get along as well as I can; you have made that pretty clear. You mean to settle down in Paris, I suppose?'

'I cannot say; everything is dark to me at present. My poor husband was taken from me so suddenly and so mys-

teriously that nothing could be arranged properly. Who could have foreseen so dreadful an event ?'

'No one, of course,' replied Sam, rather restlessly. 'We can't any of us foresee anything, for that matter. But how can you call yourself poor? Look at the squire's presents! They must be worth a good round sum, to say nothing of the legacy. I suppose my poor father was not able to do so much for you as your second husband?'

'Indeed he was not,' answered the widow, a little restless in her turn.

'But I daresay he did all he could?'

'Oh, no doubt—no doubt.' Mrs. Claver-
ing was greatly provoked that for the second time Peter Rafferty should have been introduced into a conversation which was intended to take a very different turn.

'Mr. Clavering was in a far different

station in life from that of your father. He was a gentleman.'

'Indeed! and my father was not. This is the first time you have given me to understand that.'

'You mistake me, Sam—you are always so hasty. But do not let us talk about your father to-day. Think of what I have suffered lately. Surely the death of poor Mr. Clavering must have shocked even *you*—so sudden, so horrible!'

'Hang it! Why does she keep on harking back to that?' Such was Sam's thought, but he did not express it. He merely said, 'I did not hear much about the affair. You see, you do not often trouble me with a letter, and you took pretty good care that I should not know where to find you for some time.'

'But the account of it was in all the papers.'

‘ Bother the papers ! I never read them. I heard the squire had been murdered, but I never heard who did it.’

‘ That has never been found out, Sam,’ replied the widow, feeling her heart beat a little faster, for now the decisive moment seemed to be at hand. ‘ No one can throw the least light upon the events of that dreadful night.’

‘ Were no strangers seen about the place ?’

Sam’s indifferent demeanour was gone, but his mother could see nothing more than a very natural curiosity in his tone or manner.

‘ I have not heard. If there *was* any-one, depend upon it he will be tracked. The police have been very quiet, but it is said they know a great deal more about it than they tell us. As for strangers, you

are aware how seldom we were troubled with them.'

'It was not exactly like Bond Street in the season, at Porthcawl,' said Sam, with a grin. 'Still, it's very queer that no one was seen about. Perhaps somebody in the house did it?'

'We have no reason to suspect any of the servants—they were all much attached to their master. So far as we knew, he had not an enemy in the world. He was reading a book when I left him a little before eleven o'clock, and in the morning he was found stabbed. I believe they picked up a knife——'

'Have they traced it to anybody?' interposed Sam, quickly.

His eagerness caused an additional pang to his mother, but she endeavoured to conceal it.

‘I do not know what they have traced, only I am sure the truth will be found out some day. It always is.’

‘It very seldom is, you mean. But why should you care? What is it to you who committed the murder, if there was one? If you tracked the man, he could not bring the squire to life again, could he? But I daresay there was no murder at all. The squire was a morose old curmudgeon, and in that dreary hole it was a wonder he did not kill himself long before.’

‘He was murdered,’ said the widow, pointedly, ‘and the murderer will be discovered. Be sure of that, Sam! Nothing can save him. Mr. Snapper as good as told me, only yesterday, that he knew who did this awful deed. Depend upon it, *he* will have no mercy.’

Sam started a little, but he saw how keenly his mother was watching him,

and he quietly resumed his careless mien.

‘Have it anyhow you like,’ said he, impatiently. ‘First you say that nothing is known, and then you pretend that everything is known. Settle it as you please, only, for heaven’s sake, let me hear no more of Rufus Snapper!’

‘But do you not see that the man is dangerous?’ replied the widow, irritated at her son’s obstinacy or stupidity. ‘Are you dreaming? Surely I need not tell you *all* that he said to me—you can guess something, I suppose, after what I have said.’

‘Never guessed a riddle in my life,’ replied Sam, coolly.

‘Well, what do you suppose that this man has been following you about all this time for? Because he likes your society, or intends to make you his heir?’

Sam received this outburst with great good-humour.

‘ I don’t know why Mr. Snapper comes after me,’ he replied, with a laugh, ‘ unless it is because he likes me. But I don’t intend to be scared by him. What harm can he do to me?’

‘ What have you done to place yourself in his power?’

The widow accompanied these words with a look which made Sam quail.

‘ Now,’ he thought to himself, as he turned away, ‘ I see what tack she is on. This murder is worrying her, and Finch has written to her after all.’

‘ What have I done?’ he said, aloud. ‘ Well, whatever it is, it’s my own look-out. If I am in trouble—and I told you plainly that I was—Snapper will not help me out of it—nor you either, mother, if it comes to that.’

‘ What trouble is it that you are in?’ said the widow, following him to the window,

and making him turn round and face her.

‘Do you mean to say that—that you——’

Notwithstanding her anxiety to know all, she again hesitated to put the question which was trembling upon her lips. Her son, on his part, was getting angry and defiant.

‘If she has come to badger me,’ he thought, ‘it shall not be for nothing. Why couldn’t she let me alone? She wouldn’t move a finger to prevent me getting into all this mess. Let her take some of the punishment.’

‘Speak plainly, Sam,’ urged Mrs. Clavering. ‘What have you done that you dare not tell to your own mother?’

‘Come now,’ said Sam, with a coarse laugh, ‘don’t try to get up a scene here. I shall have all the people in the house rushing in to see what’s the matter. As for what I have *done*, why should you

bother your head about it? You can do no good now; it is too late. I must see the thing out. You do not seem to have had a very good opinion of my poor father, but you shall never be able to say that his son was a coward, at any rate. I will never give in till I am made to.'

'Give in to *what?*' cried the widow, wringing her hands in her anxiety and suspense.

'To—anything! What I am in for I will face without flinching when the time comes. So you can tell Mr. Snapper that much if you like, and let him make what he can out of it. My friend, who was in the business with me, will have to stand by my side anyhow. That's a comfort—such as it is!'

The mother was now completely dismayed.

'Your *friend* in the *business*,' she stam-

mered out. 'I do not understand you!'

'No? Well, it is simple enough. You don't suppose that I can work alone, do you? This job wanted two at the very least, and I can assure you that we never found there was one too many—till now.'

'Do you mean to confess that you have been guilty of—of a crime?' asked the widow, aghast at her own thoughts and at Sam's coolness.

'Now don't go on like a woman in a play, mother! That won't do either of us any good. If I had not been driven desperate for want of money, I should not be in this scrape. If I had money even now, I daresay I could arrange matters.'

'Arrange matters!' repeated the widow, mechanically. 'Are you mad? Do you suppose that you could escape from the law if you have done—what Mr. Snapper suspects?'

‘ Oh, confound Snapper—I told you before to drop him. Find me a couple of hundred pounds, and we’ll soon see where the law is. Turn your back on me again if you like, and I am willing to stand the racket, for I’m about tired of this kind of life. For months past I’ve been expecting my chum to turn traitor—he’s threatened it more than once. I suppose he *has* written to you—next time he’ll go to the police !’

‘ Merciful heavens ! What’s to be done ?’

The widow stood looking out of the window, but she saw nothing. Her mind was in a whirl.

‘ It’s all your doing,’ said Sam, hotly. ‘ You did not want me to work for my living, and yet you would not support me without work. I had to get money

where and how I could, and at last I got the money—like this !’

Mrs. Clavering scarcely understood what her son had said ; the only thing she realised was that Rufus Snapper was not mistaken in his terrible suspicion, and that fearful disgrace hung over herself—and she was appalled.

‘ Well,’ said the son, doggedly, ‘ how is it to be ? Am I to be taken, or will you give me the means of escape ? Please yourself, remember. I am nearly desperate, and care nothing what becomes of me.’

‘ And this is my son !’

The mother shuddered as if she were very cold, and drew her mantle closer to her.

‘ You have always said so, and I see no reason to doubt it.’

‘ Heaven forgive you ! I dare not stay

here,' she went on, hurriedly, for she fancied she heard some one approaching, and she was so thoroughly unnerved that the slightest sound alarmed her. 'I will send you the money—soon—directly! I can get it, I suppose, even here, by telegraphing to my bankers. At any rate, I must try. Was there ever a more miserable woman? Oh, Sam, Sam, that you should have brought me to this.'

She could no longer fight against her sorrow; her head fell upon her breast, and she wept bitterly.

Rafferty was not entirely unmoved; he went to her, and laid his hand gently upon her arm. She shrank from him as if a serpent had stung her. Then she dried her eyes, and gathered herself up with a proud gesture, and, before her son had time to get to the door, she had opened it and was gone.

‘So much for bringing up a child in the way he should go,’ remarked Rafferty, with a shrug, as he helped himself to a cigar.

CHAPTER III.

THE PARTNERS.

SCARCELY had he lit the cigar when he heard a tap upon the door, and he made up his mind that something or other had brought his mother back again.

‘She can’t have got the cash yet,’ he muttered, ‘and I suppose she wants some more explanations. What a bore! Come in!’ he cried out, in no very pleasant mood.

The step of a man across the threshold, in answer to the invitation, sent a thrill through him, but when he looked round

and saw that his visitor was Patrick Daly, he recovered his coolness, if not his good humour.

The Irishman came in with a friendly nod, for if they had of late been somewhat estranged, they were outwardly, at least, on sufficiently good terms to meet with civility.

‘I heard you had a visitor,’ said Daly, ‘or else I should have come in half-an-hour ago. I hope Mrs. Martin is well?’

‘What should make you think Mrs. Martin has been here?’ asked Sam, looking up in surprise.

‘Well, what could be more natural? Finch is here, and I thought his daughter would come round to ask after you. They are always complaining that you never go near to ask after them.’

‘I dare say they are,’ said Sam, sulkily.

‘Had enough of them, eh? Well, they

are bores—especially the father. So it wasn't Mrs. Martin?

‘It was my mother, if you must know.’

Daly gave a long, low whistle, and sat down opposite his friend.

‘Did she say—anything?’ he asked, in a mysterious way.

‘Say anything? Well, you don't suppose that she has been struck dumb, or that she came here only to look at me? I don't know what you mean.’

But Rafferty knew perfectly well what was in his comrade's mind.

‘I mean—did she say anything about that affair?’

‘What affair?’

‘Pshaw!’ cried Daly, trying hard to suppress his annoyance. ‘You want me to believe that you are very dull to-day. I mean the murder at Porthcawl Castle, since one must speak out.’

‘Why shouldn’t we speak out? There’s not much use in whispering about it. Of course she had a good deal to say; came to talk about that and nothing else, it appears to me. She knows a good deal more than you’ll find in the newspapers.’

‘Well, this *is* interesting,’ said Daly, eyeing his companion furtively.

‘Very! according to her account, they have made some strange discoveries lately. They seem to think there’s not much more left to be found out.’

‘So they have fancied all along,’ remarked Daly, laughingly.

‘Yes, but now they have something substantial to go upon. My mother thinks they are about to make an arrest, and all through some light thrown upon the business by—whom do you think? A great friend of yours, and yet you would never guess his name!’

‘ Who is it ?’

‘ The American that we have had here several times—Mr. Snapper.’ Patrick Daly drew a long breath, as if a load had been taken from his mind, but Rafferty did not observe this. ‘ What he has found out,’ he went on, ‘ I do not exactly know, but it must be something important, or my mother would not have made such a fuss about it.’

‘ I heard that an American had been making himself very busy over this affair,’ said Daly ; and then he added, in a lower voice : ‘ but his name was not Rufus Snapper.’

‘ What, has there been somebody else nosing around ? The old lady said nothing about that. Who is *your* man ?’

‘ My man is that Southerner we have heard so much about—Colonel Pendleton. I should have thought there was enough to

attend to in his own affairs, if it be true, as they say, that his daughter was just going to marry Geoffrey Clavering, when they discovered he was married already.'

'The deuce! The young squire married, and my mother never found it out! Why, she will never forgive herself. What a godsend this would have been to her! If her husband had known it, he would have left the Castle and the park to my mother—neither is entailed, you know. Well, well! What fools we have all been!'

'You are so good at worming out secrets,' sneered Daly, 'that it is a wonder you did not unearth this, especially as Geoffrey Clavering married a friend of your own.'

'Are you joking?'

'Not at all. His wife is the daughter of Tom Finch.'

Daly had great doubts in his own mind whether this would be any news to

his friend, but Rafferty's utter bewilderment removed them. He saw at once that Finch had managed to deceive them all.

'You mean to say,' said Rafferty, starting up from his chair in astonishment, 'that young Clavering married Mrs. Martin?'

'Married the woman who goes under that name. They caught him young, you see; the girl was attractive enough in those days, and the father was quite a respectable man. He has changed a good deal since then—so has she.'

'But why didn't Finch tell *me* about the marriage,' asked Rafferty, much puzzled.

'Because he doesn't dare to open his mouth about his daughter. She is the only human being Finch is afraid of. Besides, all this time he has been living upon her husband, so it paid him to keep the whole thing dark.'

‘Does she know that?’

‘I doubt it; if she did, she would make it hot for Finch. There is no telling how much money he has had out of this Geoffrey Clavering—hundreds a year, I’ll be bound.’

‘I shouldn’t wonder,’ said Sam, as the recollection passed through his mind of the cheques handed to him by Finch. ‘Perhaps,’ thought he, ‘they were not forged after all. Why should not young Clavering have given them to him? He would keep up the mystery to deceive me, and prevent his daughter getting hold of the money. My mouth was shut, so he was safe all round.’

‘You seem to be in a brown study about it,’ remarked Daly, eyeing him attentively.

‘That’s so—I am.’ And he fell back upon his own reflections, for a new thought

occurred to him, and it was this : even if the cheques were forgeries, was it likely that Clavering would prosecute his own father-in-law? If he did not, the accomplice could not well be attached, and he, Sam Rafferty, would be safe. At this he felt so elated that he was inclined to go up and shake hands with Daly, but in a moment his natural distrust revived.

‘How did you come to know all this?’ he asked, suspiciously.

‘From Finch himself. He has been here since yesterday, and told me all about it. He wants to see you particularly—on business, I presume,’ added Daly, with a little cough.

‘Yes,’ said Sam, on his guard. ‘I have often told you that we had a little business together. We are partners, though whether he has always acted on the square with

me I begin to doubt. We must have an explanation.'

'And after that you will pay me that money?'

'I will try.'

'Well, then, shall Finch come up here and see you now?'

'Of course,' said Rafferty, 'bring him by all means. The sooner I know everything, the better.'

When Daly had gone, Rafferty took a survey of the entire position, and did not like it so much as he fancied he did at first. Suppose the cheques were forged, and Finch denied all knowledge of the forgery? They had been passed by Rafferty; he alone might be held responsible. If they were not forged, why should Finch have hesitated to get them cashed himself?

'I am in his power,' thought Rafferty,

his spirits once more sinking. Consequently when Finch made his appearance, conducted by Daly, he was inwardly disquieted, though there was no sign of it in the cordial greeting which he gave to his 'partner.'

'Why, what a stranger you are,' he said, cheerfully; 'to think that you should be in Birmingham, and go to Daly first! What have I done?'

'I wanted to see our friend Daly on some private matters,' replied Finch, in his pleasantest manner, 'but of course I should not have gone away without seeing you. Dear me, how you have altered! Have you been ill or worried?'

'A little of both,' said Sam, with a sickly sort of smile.

'It's the worry that does all the mischief,' observed Finch, tranquilly. 'I know, for I have had my full share of it.'

‘So you have—and now you are all right, I hear. Daly has only just told me about your daughter. Quite a romance!’

Finch helped himself to the most comfortable chair in the room, and brought out a silk handkerchief from his pocket, and drew it gently round his greasy hat. Then he deposited it on the table, and began attending with the same care to his boots. Daly sat down opposite to him, but Rafferty moved restlessly about the room.

‘Yes,’ said Finch, with a gentle sigh, ‘it is a strange story, and I think you will both acknowledge—you who have known me and my daughter for a long time—that I have always done the very best I could for her. Also that I have kept her secret well. That ought to show *you*, Sam,’ he added, significantly, ‘that I *can* keep a secret.’

‘No doubt,’ replied Sam, meekly enough.

‘A father’s cares are many,’ continued Finch, picking up his oratorical manner by degrees, ‘but acquit yourself of them conscientiously, and all is well. My daughter to-day would not be the wife of the Squire of Porthcawl if it had not been for my good management. There were difficulties; Geoffrey Clavering was very shy at first. I had to tool him gently along. Persevere, Sam, in everything you undertake—it is the secret of success. I have almost looked upon Sam as my own son,’ he added, addressing Daly.

‘I looked upon him as your son-in-law,’ replied Daly, with a laugh.

‘Some people did, I believe,’ said Finch, joining in the laugh. ‘My daughter and Sam were great friends—they might possibly have been more, but for a little impedi-

ment. I refer to the previous claim upon her.'

'Which one? young Clavering's?'

Daly put these questions sharply, and Finch was evidently confused.

'Whose else?' he said, looking hard at Daly. 'Have I not told you they are man and wife?'

'Geoffrey Clavering never troubled her much, did he?'

'All the same, she is his wife. He always told us that, if we breathed a word about the marriage, his father would cut him off with the well-known shilling, and a shilling divided among three would have given us just fourpence each. You cannot do much with fourpence in these days; therefore I consented to secrecy. We shall now soon be in clover, I trust—although the crop is rather scanty at present.'

‘What a clever fellow you are, Finch,’ exclaimed Rafferty, to all appearance in a burst of honest admiration.

‘My dear boy,’ replied Finch, passing his fingers caressingly through his hair, ‘you only see the triumph—you have not looked on at the struggle. Without a proper sense of honour to guide me, where should I have been? I had to manage everybody. There was my own daughter—she actually took it into her head that her husband had been ill-used; that he had been drawn into a trap; and that she only married him to please me!’

‘She will change her mind now that she is to be mistress of Porthcawl,’ said Daly, encouragingly.

But Finch’s sunny smile departed, and his brow darkened.

‘To be open with you,’ he remarked, ‘I am not so sure of that. Her conduct is

queer ; she goes off to Porthcawl without saying a word to me, sees her husband, kicks up a dust, and then, hang me if she does not come back to Garlick Hill just as if nothing had happened. Now she refuses to talk about her intentions, and forbids me to see her husband. What do you think of that ?

‘She will come round,’ said Rafferty. ‘Is it likely she will refuse a fine house and lots of money for the sake of living in a dirty attic ?’

‘My apartments are humble, sir, I admit,’ responded Finch, loftily, ‘but they have been the abode for years past of an honest man and a virtuous woman. Your language is offensive.’

‘Well, I meant no offence,’ said Rafferty, with a hang-dog look.

‘My daughter, sir,’ continued Finch, ‘once contracted a friendship—I may al-

most say an affection—for you. She looked upon you as—as a brother,’ said Finch, apparently beating about for a word. ‘What has she done to justify your sneers?’

‘Hang it, Finch,’ cried Sam, despairingly, ‘don’t fire up so quickly. I never meant to sneer at your daughter, or at you either—you cursed old fool,’ he muttered, angrily.

‘Emily Clavering,’ said Finch, disregarding him, ‘for I may at least call her by her right name, has a proud and independent spirit, her only heritage. When she went to Porthcawl Castle, she fancied that she had a rival—that the daughter of the American colonel was about to cross her path. Who told her so, I really cannot remember, but it must have been some one who knew.’

‘Yourself, you old rascal,’ muttered

Rafferty, but he took good care that Finch should not hear him.

‘Well, she went, carried all before her, and then retired from the field. My plan succeeded——’

‘Oh, it was *your* plan, then?’ interposed Rafferty, with a chuckle.

‘Well, what if it was? Has not a father a right to protect his daughter?’

‘Go on—never mind him,’ said Daly, soothingly. ‘The truth is, Sam is not quite himself this morning. He’s had his mother here.’

‘Then I forgive him,’ said Finch, magnanimously. ‘We all have our trials in this world. Well, Emily went to Porthcawl, let the cat out of the bag, and now refuses to profit by it. I swear to you that it drives me wild to think of it. Why did she not then and there take up her

permanent quarters in the house—the best rooms? When I ask her how soon she is going back and when *I* am to go down, she laughs—laughs derisively at me, her father! After all that I have done for her.’

‘But her husband contributes to her support?’ suggested Daly.

‘Well, no,’ replied Finch, in an embarrassed tone, ‘not directly—not for several years—that is to say——’

‘Why,’ said Daly, enjoying the other’s confusion, and throwing out his next remark entirely at hap-hazard, ‘I have heard that there was a regular allowance settled upon her, and that a good deal of money has been paid besides.’

Finch gave Sam Rafferty a look which said, as plainly as words could do, ‘Have you told him this?’ Rafferty understood it, and answered at once.

‘I have heard nothing about it,’ said

he; 'perhaps your daughter told him.'

'My daughter! Why, she *knows* nothing—she has never received a shilling from her husband since the early days of the marriage. She thinks the poor young man has been victimised enough without our taking any more of his money from him.'

'How kind of her,' said Daly, shrugging his shoulders. 'You haven't brought her up very well, Finch.'

'It's her confounded obstinacy that ruins all. She might get an allowance now--and one for me besides—if it were not for that. To think of my own child condemning me to poverty when we might be rolling in riches!'

'Still, I suppose Clavering *has* forked out pretty liberally?'

'It depends upon what you choose to call liberality, Daly. I have had a mere

trifle from him compared with what I deserve, *that* I know. It all came in dribbets, and it was very hard to get, wasn't it, Sam ?'

'I suppose so—you say so,' replied Sam, irritably.

'Well, some of it went to pay debts ; some of it I dropped in little speculations. If I had won, we should all have been well off, so I did my best. Whatever the amount was, it all went. The question now is, how to get more? Your mother,' he added, turning to Sam, 'has left the Castle?'

He dwelt upon the last two words with the proud tone of a man who has a proprietary interest in a real feudal domain.

'She went long ago,' answered Rafferty, shortly.

'You mean, I suppose, after the murder, and that was not so very long ago. By-

the-by, Mr. Daly, what a very unaccountable affair that was !'

'Very,' said Daly, with a yawn.

'I had not the pleasure of an acquaintance with my esteemed relation, the old squire, but I could have given him a hint that a little watchfulness over his house would not have been thrown away—eh, Sam?'

'I daresay you could,' growled Rafferty.

'But of course he would have paid no attention to me. You never liked him, I believe?'

He looked knowingly at Rafferty as he spoke.

'I never cared about him, one way or the other. Why should I?'

'Exactly; and yet I have heard you make some very ugly remarks about him.'

'Enough of this foolery,' cried Rafferty,

savagely; 'you are not the first person who has been at me to-day. You are all in a conspiracy, I think. Suppose you tell me what you came here to see me about?'

'Willingly, but I will wait till you are in a better humour. We will go out for a little turn together, and you shall give me some lunch. Daly will excuse us, as we have business to talk over.'

When the Irishman had gone, Finch went up to Rafferty and said to him, in a low voice,

'I came to tell you, my boy, that the game is up.'

'Whose game?'

'My game—your game—everybody's game. They know all about the forgery, and intend to prosecute me. I am afraid they know all about you too, and, if I were you, I should cut and run while I had the

chance. Placed as I am, I cannot run. I shall stay and see it out.'

'You mean to say that you have split?' said Sam, with a white face.

'I have told them nothing,' replied Finch, sternly, 'but I believe they know all, just the same. Take a friendly hint, and go while you can. I have seen Clavering and that prying sneak, Rufus Snapper. They mean to drag me up for those cheques, and, since Emily won't interfere, I don't see why they should spare me. But I intend to take all the chances; when it comes to the worst, my girl will not see her father go to jail. At least, I think not. Anyhow, I shall stand fast. Now, what do you mean to do?'

'Leave me alone and let me think it out,' said Sam, opening the door. 'I wish I had never set eyes upon you, or your daughter either,' he growled, as Finch passed out.

But Finch, if he heard the remark, was not at all discomposed. He went downstairs humming a lively air, while Rafferty turned back into his room, locked the door carefully, and sat down motionless before the fire.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COLONEL AND HIS DAUGHTER.

SINCE the day when Colonel Pendleton and his daughter had taken their departure from Porthcawl Castle, they had seldom conversed together on the one subject which was uppermost in their minds. Soon after they reached Paris, the colonel received a letter from Geoffery Clavering, which he read carefully more than once; but at the time he did not show it, or even say a word about it, to his daughter.

He hoped that she would soon forget what he still regarded as a mere passing incident in her life, and to this end he made up his mind to talk about it as little as possible. Edith Pendleton seemed only too well pleased to shun all reference to the past. Her manner had wholly changed, as the colonel told Rufus Snapper. From being full of life and gaiety, she had become absorbed and silent, and her father began also to be taciturn and thoughtful. His old cares and anxieties stalked out from their hiding-places, and sat down by his side, and refused to be dislodged. Edith soon noticed this, and she was greatly troubled for him, as he was for her. She startled him one evening by making the very proposal which he was anxious above all things to carry out.

‘Father,’ she said, ‘could we not go to our own home again? I have not seen it

since I was a child. I think we are both tired of wandering about.'

'Has that traitor, Rufus, been putting this idea into your head, my child?'

'He has not said a word—why should he?'

'Well, you will think it very strange, but I was talking to him only the other day about this very matter, and telling him how much I longed to get a sight of the poor old homestead again. And now the same wish seems to have crossed your mind.'

'It has often done so, but I thought it would vex you if I mentioned it. Many unhappy things took place there, I know; but that was all long ago. We have been away so many years!'

'I know it; and an old man, such as I, is apt to get rather acute twinges of homesickness every now and then. To be sure,

our home was but a sad one to us at last, but we cannot very well get another now—at least, I cannot. You are young, and can do anything.’

‘Indeed, I do not feel as if I could,’ said Edith, with a laugh, in which there was a dash of sadness. ‘There are many things I cannot do. But, at any rate, I can prevent you being kept a prisoner here, where I am sure you do not want to be. Since the poor squire’s death, you have been very restless, and I often see that you long to be off. Then why should we remain?’

‘For no reason in the world,’ replied the colonel, half-pleased and half-mystified. ‘We are free to go where we like, and our own country is not so bad a place, after all. Poor Virginia is not lying bound and gagged, with birds of prey all round her, as she was when we were obliged to say

good-bye to her. Her wounds, like mine, are at any rate scarred over. Yes, yes, we can go back whenever we like—if it is the best thing to be done under all the circumstances.'

The colonel was thinking aloud rather than talking to his daughter.

'I am sure it is the best thing, papa. We ought to have gone long ago.'

'Perhaps it would have been best,' acknowledged the colonel, eyeing his daughter wistfully, and longing to read her heart, as perhaps a mother would have done. 'Is it only of late, my dear,' he said, gently, 'that you have wished to go back home?'

'Yes, papa, since we have been here.'

'I understand; we neither of us like this French life very much, that is the reason for your remembering the Shenandoah Valley. When people are not happy,

they are sure to think of their home; it is natural to us all. We have been like dwellers in tents, you and I, since you were ever so small a child, and that was well enough in England, for there we had good friends. But here we are strangers; I do not know one American in fifty, and have no particular wish to renew my acquaintance with that one. The English people, too,'—the colonel was now speaking with rather more vivacity than usual, little thinking that his daughter, young as she was, understood perfectly well, and saw that he was only trying to make her believe that he was quite cheerful and at ease—'they suit me better than the French. It takes you a mighty long time to know the English properly, but when you know them you are pretty sure to like them. We Americans go off all at once—fizz—bang!

and then it is over. Whether we see an old friend again, or whether we do not, makes no difference.'

'And is that the way you feel towards poor Mr. Snapper?' said the young girl, in a mock tone of reproach.

'Ah, that is a horse of a very different colour. Dear old Snapper! We shall miss him, and he us. We have known each other in great trouble; for *that* is a visitor which has come to each in his day. There are ties between us that nothing can break.'

'And so you think he counts me as nothing? You flatter yourself it is all for love of you he is with us so much? Poor, simple papa!'

'Well, let us divide the honours, and take him back with us. That paper-mill of ours has made money enough by this time, somebody else should now have a

turn at it. But he will not go just yet, so you must make up your mind to wait a little while. You are not in any particular hurry?’

There was again the wistful look in the colonel’s eyes which Edith had noticed before, and which she could interpret right well.

‘I do not want to go anywhere, unless you wish to go also.’

‘I am anxious to return, my child, for some reasons ; but there are several things which must be done first. And then, I cannot feel quite sure how you will like it. So many things have changed. It will all seem very small and dull, I am afraid.’

‘I can just remember it, papa. The house is very old-fashioned and quaint, with large trees all round about it, and big balconies almost as broad as the rooms.

And then there were the negroes ; but of course they have all gone.'

'Not all ; your old nurse and her husband, Uncle Brutus, are still there, and a few others. They have always said they would wait till old massa returned ; but the fact is that old massa has had very little idea of going back any more—till lately.'

His voice sank as he uttered the last words, and he seemed once more to be about to relapse into a brooding state. Edith went up to him, and put her hand in his, and they walked up and down the room together.

'I am sure the place will look lovely again, papa, and everybody will be so glad to see you. Mr. Snapper must come with us ; I shall tell him so. That is settled.'

'You can soon arrange Snapper's affairs

for him,' said the father, smiling at his daughter's intense earnestness.

'Oh, yes, and everybody else's, when I am in the vein, as I am now. I think our national orators are right, papa—Europe is "played out." We must get to some free country, where our American lungs can expand. And then, you know, I should like to see some of my own countrymen in their native haunts; they cannot all be like the droll-looking persons we see round the courtyards of these hotels.'

'Oh, no, some of them are quite civilised,' said the colonel, drily.

'Then let us go over there and see them, for that kind seldom seem to come here. We will get up little parties, once a week or so—I suppose there is a lawn?'

'Well, there is plenty of grass.'

'That is just what you want to make a lawn out of. We will get all the pretty

girls together, and all the nice young men. We shall easily find out who they are?’

‘Oh, no difficulty at all about that,’ replied the colonel, with a twinkle of the eye.

‘Then you see how easily it is managed. You are sure you are in earnest, papa, about wanting to go back?’

‘Well, I believe I am,’ said the colonel, not by any means certain what Edith was aiming at. ‘I think I have made up my mind, though I did not have much thought about going till—till these recent events happened. Somehow, they have unsettled me very much.’

‘So then, that is what you have been thinking of all this time without saying a word to me?’ She spoke in a tone of mock solemnity, and shook her finger at him.

‘Yes, that is it,’ said the colonel, with

an air of entire submission to the court. 'But, if I am not much mistaken, there has been something hidden away in your thoughts also?'

'Oh, many things! But we ought to have come to one another, and had it all out. When we get away from here, we will neither talk nor think about it any more.'

'If you really mean that, we cannot go too soon,' said the colonel, now thoroughly understanding everything. 'Of course, I have noticed that you were not quite yourself, but I knew that you would come to me when you thought I could help you in any way, and what was the good of coming before? So we will go back—it is full time. I wish now that I had proposed it before. There will be no harm in our going to look at Pendleton Grange; we can but leave it again if we do not like it.'

Our family have lived in it for generations, putting on a bit here and a bit there as it was wanted, until it seems to wander all over a big field. We shall want the furniture looked to.'

'Do not have anything done till we get back, father,' said Edith, with a good deal more animation than she had shown for weeks past. 'It will be something to amuse and occupy us. I remember Winchester—we can get everything there in those splendid shops.'

'My poor child,' laughed the colonel, 'you forget what age you were when you saw the splendour of the Winchester shops. After Paris and London, it is just possible that you may be disappointed with them. And then, it is sure to be a little lonely for you at first.'

'What was it at Porthcawl?'

'True,' said the colonel, wincing a little

at the sound of the word, and yet glad that at last it had been mentioned. ‘True—you seldom saw anyone but the poor old squire. What a strange fate was his! Do you know, I think I shall be able to throw some light upon it—only you must not say a word about it to anybody at present.’

‘What! Have you really found out anything, papa?’

‘Upon my word, I think I have,’ replied the colonel, delighted to see that his daughter’s listlessness was gone, and that there was even a little colour in her cheeks.

‘I have been at work on a little idea of my own, and, if I am right, my friend Roland Clavering lost his life because he was supposed to stand in the way of another man becoming rich.’

‘And you have never told me a word of this!’

‘Because I was not sure, and I am not

quite sure now, although I feel a little nearer to it than I was. At any rate, I should like to see what it all comes to before we go away—if we ever *do* go.'

'Oh, but that is decided. You do not mean to say you were not in earnest about it?'

'I was very much in earnest.'

'So was I—therefore we shall go, and very soon, I hope. You will find plenty to do at home, and we shall both be better off there.'

'Well, we must talk it over a little more another day, and break it gently to Rufus.'

'He must do as I tell him, papa! We take him with us, as a matter of course. He must be one of the family. We will all three open a plantation on a new principle. Better anything than to sink into this useless life here.'

She spoke with a feverish energy which did not escape her father's notice.

‘It is because you are not quite yourself just now, Edith, that you talk like this. If we once settled down in Virginia, it would not be an easy matter to uproot everything again, and come back here.’

‘I should never want to come back.’

‘Not to see any of your friends?’ said the colonel, regarding her anxiously.

‘Who is there that we care very much for—except—’ she hesitated for a moment, and then looked up at her father with a trustful smile—‘except Geoffrey.’

‘You have been thinking a good deal of him since we left Porthcawl?’ asked the colonel, with the relief of a man who feels that the worst is passing over.

‘Yes, papa—how could I help that? So friendly as we have all been together, and so sad as he is now! If you had seen

that dreadful woman, you would have been shocked. She could not have looked like that when Geoffrey married her.'

'They say she was pretty enough then, although much older than he. I *have* seen her—she is the woman I met in that queer place in the city.'

'But you had no idea who she was?'

'I only knew that she was the daughter of a worthless impostor. What a pretty set for the son of Roland Clavering to become entangled with. The boy must have been mad!'

'It is *because* he was a boy, papa—you must not blame him, as if he had only just done it. He was so much away from home, and so left to himself. If these were cunning, wicked people, they could do what they liked with him.'

'They *were* and they *did*,' said the colonel, with a little groan. 'It is a good

thing that his father never knew of it. If this had been told to him, the assassin's knife would not have been necessary. A man so proud would never have survived the news of such a marriage.'

'And yet there was his own marriage, papa—was not that a little strange?'

'So it was; I verily believe these things run in families sometimes. Geoffrey was driven from home by the squire's second wife, and you see what misery has come of it!'

'Do you think, then,' said the young girl, with a somewhat faltering voice, 'that Geoffrey is unhappy?'

'Think,' said the colonel, vehemently, for his feelings now got the upper hand, '*Think*, do you say? Why, the poor young fellow is driven to despair about it. I do not believe there is a more wretched man in all England to-day, and he has good

cause to be so. How is it possible for him to live with these people? The man—her father—is a terror even to think of; one of the men who ought not to be at large. This marriage was a plot concocted for his own benefit, and, now that Geoffrey is rich, is it likely he will give him up? As for the woman ——’

‘Where has she gone, papa?’

‘Back to her precious father. Geoffrey has written all about it to me, poor fellow! He tries to bear up, but I know that he is a broken man. He offered to provide a suitable home for his wife, and she never even answered his letter. Geoffrey will have to go abroad somewhere and shut up his house. He told me part of the dismal story before we left Porthcawl, but he has told me more since then in a letter.’

‘Tell me all about it too,’ said the young girl, with all her old animation.

‘Evidently,’ thought the colonel, ‘this talk will not do her any harm—we might as well get it over and done at once.’

‘Well, my dear,’ he said, ‘I need not go into the whole of it now, but I think it is clear that Geoffrey has behaved—well, *rashly*, perhaps, but not *dishonourably*.’

‘Oh, I was very sure of that, papa.’

‘The dishonour has been all on the other side. Finch was and is a scoundrel; his daughter is not so bad, I hope, but there are many questionable circumstances in her case, too. She must have had an attachment of some kind to another man at the very time of the marriage, for, after a little while, she actually ran away from Geoffrey and wrote to ask his forgiveness, and assured him she would never trouble him again! He had not seen her for several years until she presented herself at Porthcawl that day. But the father took

care Geoffrey should not forget *him*! He has plundered him remorselessly all the way through.'

'But what made this man write to you, papa?'

'I suppose he was curious to see me, and then, I remember, he asked several questions about *you*. I fancy I begin to understand it now. He had heard a good deal about us from that fellow Rafferty, and perhaps he began to think that'—here the colonel suddenly checked himself: 'but who can tell what such a rascal did or did not think? No doubt he was hatching this scheme of bringing a great scandal upon all our heads even then, and I thought he was merely trying to get money out of me.'

'Then Geoffrey was surprised to see this woman at the Castle?'

'Surprised, my dear child? I think an

earthquake would have surprised him less, for she had never molested him before. He paid her an ample allowance through her father, and that was all she cared for. It was the father who set her on to do this, and in some way or other I hope he will meet with his deserts.'

'And she—Geoffrey's wife'—the colonel could see what an effort it cost his daughter to utter these words, bravely as she strove to conceal it—'she is with her father, you say? Did she leave the Castle soon?'

'My dear, she had gone long before we left the place. She only came to do mischief, and, having done as much as she could, off she went.'

'I see now,' said the young girl, drawing a long breath.

'Yes, that was it,' assented her father, for he divined her thought. 'The wretched

woman never cared for him, or she could not have acted as she did. But she intended this as a great surprise—a shock—to *you*, and with that she was satisfied.'

'But why had she any animosity towards me?'

'Because,' replied the colonel, fidgetting about,—'one can scarcely tell—she may have been told things—that you and Geoffrey were great friends, and so on.'

These sentences passed from the colonel's lips in a disjointed fashion, but his daughter had sufficient penetration to fill up the blanks, and her eyes sparkled.

'Poor Geoffrey!' she said. 'You will see him, papa, and let him know how deep is our sympathy for him—that there is no other feeling in our hearts towards him. He might think we were estranged from him—you will tell him it is not so?'

‘He understands that, my child,’ said the colonel, gently, and feeling more at ease in his mind than he had done for a long time past. ‘You are a good, brave girl, and I have been a poor sort of father not to have had more confidence in you. I might have known how you would have acted, but the truth is, I thought——’ the colonel paused; somehow he did not like to tell his child what he thought. But she stood up before him, and said, in a tone of mock reproach,

‘Then you must not think such things again, papa, or I shall ask Mr. Snapper to adopt me as his child.’

‘Well, that would be no great punishment to him!’

‘But to you?’

‘Oh, I should come and see you pretty much the same as I do now. Call it Rufus’s

house or mine, it seems to make no difference.'

'Then you understand the compact?'

'Perfectly!' exclaimed the delighted colonel.

'And there are to be no more mysteries between us?'

'Not the ghost of one.'

'Then that will do. Now get ready to take me to the theatre, and we will both be as happy as we used to be.'

'You are sure that *you* feel so?'

He drew her face towards his, and looked hard and lovingly into her eyes.

'Entirely sure! Only we must go back to Virginia.'

'Anywhere you like!'

'So then,' thought the colonel, as he dressed for dinner, 'the wound will heal! No man can ever understand any woman,

not even if she is his own daughter ! Well, that being settled, I shall have time to attend to that other affair—and the sooner the better. To-morrow, then, my dear Rufus, your eyes shall be opened !’

CHAPTER V.

PREPARING A NET.

MR. RUFUS SNAPPER was waiting in the colonel's room to have his eyes opened, and he was not kept long. His old friend had sent for him early in the morning, and begged him to come at once. Snapper was at the hotel before the messenger had time to get back.

‘It is not about Edith?’ said he, directly he saw the colonel.

‘It is not; she is all right.’

‘Better than she has been of late?’

‘Better than I have seen her since the

beginning of all those tragic days at Porthcawl. No, it is not about her—it is about the murder of the old squire !’

‘ Ah !’ exclaimed Snapper, as he took off his gloves slowly, and moved a chair close to the table.

‘ You have your own theory about that, Rufus, and so have I. That much we have known all along. Very well—the time has come when you must give up your theory, and adopt mine.’

‘ Indeed !’ said Snapper, grimly.

‘ We might have had this talk before, but I have had a good deal to think about, and everything but my child has been driven out of my head. Now let us recall what happened on the night of the murder, and then I will tell you the [conclusions I have reached.]’

‘ Very good,’ said Snapper, confident that the colonel was on a false scent. ‘ I

remember most of the incidents, I suspect, but it will do no harm to remind me of them.'

'You recollect, then, that on that night Roland Clavering went to his room rather earlier than usual, and that his wife saw him about eleven o'clock. He was then reading. Some time after that, one of the servants who was passing the door heard the squire talking—he heard two voices distinctly, one of which he did not recognise.'

'I never believed him.'

'I think he was mistaken, although the squire might have been talking aloud to himself, as he had the habit of doing. Anyhow, nothing more was heard until that dreadful cry rang through the house—a cry I never can forget! It was a long time even after that before we found what had happened. The squire had been

killed—killed almost immediately. There could have been no struggle—there was but time for the doomed man to utter the cries I heard. You and I searched everywhere for some trace of the murderer, and we found none, except that knife.’

‘And there was no mark of any kind on that.’

‘So we all thought. The police took the knife away with them, and I thought no more about it until the idea came into my head which I have ever since been slowly working out. When that idea first occurred to me, I went to the police-station, and asked them to let me look at the knife again. The inspector took me into his private office, and we had a little chat together.

“No news yet, inspector?” I said.

“Not a scrap, colonel. The London men have been down, but they are as much

in the dark as we are. My belief is that none of our people round about here had anything to do with it—the thing was done by a stranger. What puzzles me most is that nothing in the house was touched. Where's the motive for the murder? That's the mystery."

" "You forget one thing," I said, "and that is that I got up directly I heard the cries, and went over part of the house, opening and shutting several doors. The noise I must have made alarmed the murderer, and he went off without the booty, if he had come for that."

" "Why, what else *could* he have come for, colonel?"

" "It might have been some one with a grudge against the poor squire!" said I, to draw the man out.

" "No one about here," said the inspector, emphatically. "I don't deny that

times have been hard with many of our people, but we haven't got into the way yet of paying rent with the knife and pistol. But you want to see the knife, sir? Of course, there is no objection to that."

'The inspector now unlocked a drawer, took out the knife, and handed it to me. I examined it afresh, and, as I suspected, among the scratches that at first I had noticed only in a general way, there were two or three which could not have been made by accident. These were the marks which kept continually recurring to me whenever I thought of the murder; I seemed to see shapes and forms in them which none of us noticed at the time. Strange to say, I saw them more than once very distinctly in my sleep. That was why I went back to look at the knife again. Well, I turned it over and over, examining

every inch of it, and it did not take very long this time to see that the marks which had been so dancing about in my brain really represented a letter—an initial—cut some years ago, and with various flourishes and strokes round about and even across it—perhaps intended to disguise or obliterate it. But I could make out the letter—I will show you how it all looked.'

The colonel took a piece of paper and a pencil, and drew an outline of the various marks which he had seen on the knife.

'Can you make anything out of that?' he said, pushing the paper across to Snapper, who examined it minutely.

'It looks like the letter——'

'Just so,' interrupted the colonel, hurriedly, 'but do not mention it aloud, here or anywhere else, for walls have ears, and my only chance of success is to keep every-

thing dark. I want to follow up this thread without saying a word to anyone but you. If I turn out to be wrong, go on with your own line, and I will do what I can to help you. First of all, I want you to help *me* !'

'You know very well I will do that,' said Snapper, promptly, 'whether you are right or wrong.'

'Do you think you could go down to Liverpool? The man I want is there—he went only yesterday, according to my information, but I want to be quite sure of it. I cannot go at present for various reasons. Will you go for me?'

'To the other end of the world if need be.'

'To-day?'

'To-day or any other day. Surely you need not ask these questions? What is it I am to do?'

‘Go to a certain address which I shall give you, and find out if a certain person is there. His name——’

‘Write it down with the address before I go,’ said Snapper; ‘as you said just now, walls have ears.’

‘If my surmise is correct, you will telegraph just one word to me, and I will join you at once.’

‘And then you will leave the police to do the rest?’

‘On the contrary, I shall not say a word to them about it. If I were to do so, depend upon it the owner of that knife would escape me yet, and I do not intend that he shall escape. Besides, he has aroused my curiosity; I want to have it out with him alone.’

‘You surely do not mean to tackle him single-handed?’

‘That is my intention,’ replied the

colonel, smiling at his friend's solemn face. 'Never did the old adage about too many cooks apply more strictly than it does to this business. Single-handed is the only way. If I take more hands than my own, he will slip through them; if he slips through mine,' added the colonel, with the old war-like look in his eyes, 'why, I shall never know anything about it.'

'He means,' thought Snapper, 'that he will either take this man, or that the man shall kill him. I know him well enough not to attempt to change his decision.'

But he sat thinking the matter over very seriously, the colonel looking on apparently half-amused.

'And so that fellow Finch had nothing at all to do with it?' remarked Snapper, presently.

'No more than you had. That letter of

his to me was a part of the blackmailing operation against Geoffrey. He meant to follow it up, no doubt, but the murder came and changed all his plans. He may just have suspected that some mischief was in the wind, but he is not the sort of scoundrel who takes any great risks. He would have nothing to do with a murder.'

'There were two in it, I am sure. You believe you have found one, and you guess the other?'

'I see what you mean,' replied the colonel, briefly; 'we will talk of that another day, if you like. In the meantime, let us make sure of number one. There is the address I spoke about just now'—he handed Snapper a slip of paper—'and the few particulars I want you to find out for me. I *may* hear from you by to-morrow night?'

‘If the thing is to be done, depend upon it you shall.’

‘Good. Now slip away quietly, and let no one even suspect where you are going. To-morrow night I shall expect to get a message.’

Snapper nodded, and was gone—but the morrow came and went, and no tidings arrived from him. It was the middle of the next day before a telegram was placed in the colonel’s hand—a telegram containing the single word, ‘Come!’ He had prepared everything for his sudden departure, and not a moment was lost in obeying the summons.

Rufus Snapper was waiting for him at the Liverpool station. Very few words passed between them until they reached the hotel, where the Philadelphian, with his customary regard for comfort, had installed himself in a couple of the best

rooms in the house. Then the colonel said, quietly,

‘You have found him?’

‘I have—but it was not an easy matter. He was not at the address you gave me, and the people there pretended they had never heard of him. Liverpool is an awkward place to run a man to earth in—rather worse than London, I should think. I almost despaired. However, here *you* are, and that’s a sure sign that I know where *he* is.’

‘And he does not intend to stay here long, I take it?’

‘He goes to New York to-morrow—Saturday.’

‘Well, but I really must be consulted about that,’ said the colonel, with a laugh. ‘He has had his own way a long time; it is time we had a little reckoning together.’

‘There is nothing to prevent it now. The man suspects nothing—even if he saw me here, he would never dream what I had come for. He knows I am frequently here.’

‘But he has not seen you?’

‘Have no fears—I have kept out of his way.’

‘Excellent! Now listen, my dear Rufus! I intend to go alone to this man—that I told you from the first.’

‘Why in the world should I not go with you?’

‘Because I mean to do it all myself,’ replied the colonel, laughing slightly again. ‘I am selfish, you see, and will not let anybody into this little project of mine. But I tell you what you shall do,’ he added, seeing that the Philadelphian looked obstinate as well as dissatisfied, ‘you shall go with me to the house where our friend

is, and, if you are particularly anxious about me, you shall wait somewhere in the neighbourhood till I rejoin you. If *he* comes out before me, or without me, I give you leave to interfere—not else! Is that agreed?’

‘I don’t much like it, but I suppose it must be as you wish,’ replied Snapper, reluctantly.

‘That is just it,’ said the colonel, pressing his friend’s hand. ‘I have arranged everything for the best. Let me see—it is eight o’clock now. We will have something to eat and start in an hour. Will that suit you?’

They sat down to the table together, but very little more was said until the hour had expired.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BIRD IS CAUGHT.

A DRIZZLING rain was falling when they went out into the streets, and Snapper shivered as he looked around him.

‘I hate this place,’ he said; ‘it is dirty, it is full of dilapidated men and women, and it reeks of gin. Every second house in it seems to be a drinking-den. It was the first place in the world where I ever saw a drunken woman.’

But the colonel walked by his side, silent and thoughtful, and thus they went on

until they reached a street in a part of Liverpool which Colonel Pendleton had never seen before. Snapper, after a moment's hesitation, stopped before a clean and unpretending house, outside of which there was a sign denoting that it was a temperance hotel.

‘You would scarcely suppose that this was the place of his choice, but I daresay he likes to be out of the way. His room is on the first floor—number seven.’

‘A fateful number!’ said the colonel, and he made a sign of adieu to his companion.

A woman dressed in black was standing at the door, and she scrutinised the colonel closely as he passed. He took off his hat, and went his way up the stairs. Rufus Snapper walked to the other end of the street, and turned the corner sharply. Then he lingered about for a few minutes

until a thought suddenly struck him, and he hailed a passing cab. The driver looked curiously at him when he received his instructions, but he did as he was told—he drove to the nearest police-station.

Meanwhile, Colonel Pendleton had found the room he was in search of—a room in a corner, at the end of a passage. For a single moment he stood at the door as if in uncertainty, then he held himself erect and rapped gently with his stick. A voice from within muttered something which might or might not be construed as an invitation to enter. The colonel placed his own interpretation upon it, opened the door, and found himself face to face with a powerful, determined-looking man in his shirt-sleeves. He had evidently been interrupted in the work of packing a large trunk.

The two stood looking silently at each

other, at first without a movement on either side. Then the colonel noticed that the man's eye ran rapidly to a chair by the bedside, and on that chair he observed a revolver. The occupant of the room was aware that the colonel saw everything; he threw his towel carelessly over the revolver, and looked hard at the intruder.

‘Evidently you have made some mistake,’ said he, a little superciliously.

‘No mistake,’ replied the colonel, laying his hat and stick upon the table, ‘if, as I believe, your name is—Patrick Daly!’

The Irishman was astonished, and he turned half-involuntarily towards the chair. But the colonel was so calm and so self-possessed that he almost disarmed suspicion. Daly looked doubtfully at him.

‘You seem to know my name, at any rate. Perhaps you will now condescend to tell me your business.’

‘Yes, for we have something to say to each other. My name is Pendleton—Colonel Pendleton. Perhaps you have heard of me?’

‘I believe I have,’ replied Daly, and a dark look passed over his face. ‘You are a friend of Sam Rafferty’s—is it through *him* that you are here?’

‘I do not even know the gentleman—except by name.’

They were now watching each other closely; both were aware that serious work was before them.

‘He talks as if he had met you at that place in Wales—what’s the name of it?’

‘Porthcawl Castle, perhaps,’ said the colonel, with studied emphasis.

Daly laid one hand upon the table, and the colonel saw that his pale lips were tightly compressed, and that his firm jaw was set.

‘It would be agreeable to me to sit down,’ said the colonel, pleasantly—‘especially if you will do the same.’

For an instant, the Irishman did not move; there was a fierce expression in his eyes which might have led anyone to fear that he was meditating a sudden spring upon his visitor. The colonel was either unconscious or indifferent.

Daly took a chair, and placed it almost within reach of the colonel. Then he made a movement towards the door, and said, in a low voice,

‘We had better be undisturbed, and the only way to make sure of that is—to lock the door.’

He suited the action to the word, and put the key in his pocket.

‘The very thing I should have suggested,’ said the imperturbable colonel. ‘We do not want any listeners present at

our little conference—at least, *you* do not. To me it is a matter of indifference.’

‘You are very mysterious; no doubt I shall understand you presently.’

‘It shall not be my fault if you do not.’

‘Well, then, begin!’ Daly spoke in a more insolent tone than he had yet used, and his fingers were playing impatiently upon the table. ‘What is your business with me? I have an appointment in half-an-hour.’

‘You will have to break it, I am afraid,’ said the colonel, gravely.

‘It will not be for you that I break it, anyway!’

‘We shall see.’ The colonel slightly inclined his head as he spoke. ‘The fact is that I have made another appointment for you!’

‘The deuce you have!’ and as the

Irishman uttered the words he laughed heartily.

‘It is so, as you will see. I am glad to find that you look upon it with so much good humour. Now let us come to what we have to do, and get it over as soon as possible. Your friend Rafferty——’

‘Ah!’ murmured Daly, clenching his fist; ‘I knew fast enough where you had come from!’

‘I have never even seen Rafferty.’

‘Nor heard from him either, I suppose,’ said Daly, scornfully.

‘No, nor heard from him. But I know some things about him—and you. I know, for instance, that he and you once went to Porthcawl Castle together.’

‘What of it?’

‘We will come to that presently. Now Rafferty owed you a good deal of money, and always led you to believe that, when

the old squire died, he could pay you back with good interest. I have no doubt he believed it himself.'

'Why are you taking the trouble to tell me all this? Do you think it is any news?'

'Rafferty could get nothing more from his mother,' continued the colonel, not heeding the interruption, 'and *his* resources were consequently gone—so were yours. There was nothing for it but to wait until Mrs. Clavering came into the money which she expected at the squire's death. Therefore there were two persons at least who were rather anxious that the poor squire should not live very long.'

'You may put me down as one,' said Daly, in the tone of a man who was impatient to cut short all discussion.

'Precisely. And your friend Mr. Rafferty as the other.'

‘Now is all this rigmarole bringing you nearer the end of your business?’ interposed Daly, haughtily.

‘Perceptibly nearer; have patience for but a few moments longer. As I was saying——’

‘I wanted my money,’ broke in Daly again. ‘Quite natural too. If anybody owed you as much, you would be anxious to get it. We are all alike where money is concerned. Now that old fool at Porthcawl was keeping me out of my own. So it seemed *then*,’ he added, by an afterthought. ‘I did not know so much about it as I do now.’

‘More’s the pity,’ replied the colonel, with a sigh. ‘If you *had* known, my poor old friend would not have died that night!’

Again Daly made a sudden movement which was ominous of mischief. He had

now shifted himself nearer to the chair by the bed on which the revolver was placed. The colonel noticed it, but he did not change his attitude. He was simply watchful, as he had been from the first—watchful and resolved.

‘You went to Porthcawl Castle,’ he resumed, ‘once with Rafferty, and once without him. What happened when your companion was with you, need not concern us now. It is to the other occasion that I want you to cast your thoughts back.’

‘Well, go on,’ said Daly, huskily.

‘Rafferty was not asked to accompany you. He did not even know at the time that you had gone. But afterwards, when all the world was talking about what had happened, he suspected the truth, and you knew that he did. It was imprudent of you to let him see that,’ said the colonel, in a sort of aside.

‘I wish I had him here now!’ muttered Daly, grinding his teeth.

‘I tell you again, *he* is not the cause of my coming to see you to-day. Still, I cannot deny that you placed yourself to some extent in his hands. That is why you did not get your money from him after all.’

‘I *shall* get it, never fear,’ replied Daly, with a look which would have made Rafferty tremble.

‘At any rate, Rafferty has told me nothing. My information all comes from another source.’

‘From what source?’ said Daly, eagerly.

‘One of my own finding. I have followed up everything from a single discovery.’

‘Well, then, out with it!’ cried Daly, bringing his fist down violently upon the

table. 'Why all this beating about the bush?'

'On the night of the murder,' continued the colonel, in his cool way, 'I happened to be in the house, and I was the first person to enter the room where my old friend was lying. It was a wild and stormy night—perhaps you remember that?'

'What has all this got to do with me?' rejoined Daly, with rising impatience and irritation.

'You will soon know. Now if any alarm was raised, no one would have been likely to hear it: What happened in that room we can only guess. Whether the squire resisted or not, and whether he recognised his assailant, no one can tell. The murderer had escaped—there was no trace of him to be seen,'—Daly's eyes flashed, and a triumphant smile lit up his face—'that

is, *at first*,' continued the colonel, and the smile on Daly's face died away.

'After a time, I happened to see some object lying on the floor, not far from the body. Evidently it had fallen by accident, or been flung aside in some sudden alarm, and forgotten. You will understand that in the partial darkness it was difficult to distinguish anything; it was only when I had drawn aside all the curtains that I saw—*this!*'

'This—*what?*' said Daly.

The question was put in so unconcerned and defiant a manner that, if Colonel Pendleton had not felt that he thoroughly knew his man, some awkward doubts might have arisen in his mind. But, as it was, his opinions and intentions remained unchanged.

'I will show you,' he said; and as he spoke he drew from his breast pocket a

little parcel which he slowly opened, disclosing at last a long-bladed knife,—the knife which he had found on the night of the murder. ‘It was this,’ he said, as he held it towards Daly. ‘Did you ever see it before?’

As quick as lightning, Daly thrust out his hand to seize it, throwing himself half across the table for the purpose—but the colonel was prepared. He drew back and grasped the knife firmly. Daly sat glaring at him for a moment, and his breathing was short and hurried.

‘I see you recognise it,’ said the colonel, with a nod of satisfaction. ‘I knew that it was yours, for the simple reason that I found the letter D carved on it. Evidently you tried to obliterate that trace of your ownership, but you left your work half undone. The police could not

make out the meaning of all these scratches upon the handle.'

'And you flatter yourself that you did,' remarked Daly, with an effort to resume his usual manner.

'I am sure of it ; but it was some time before I succeeded. I knew of you a little through a friend of mine, Mr. Rufus Snapper—ah, I see you know him !—but, mind you, he suspected nothing. He fancied it was Rafferty who used this knife.'

'So it was !' cried Daly, with an oath.

'I never believed it for a moment—he is too great a coward. It wanted a man of a more desperate nature to plot this murder—a man whose nerves were of iron, and in whose soul all thought of compassion and mercy was dead—a man who had no more feeling of pity in him than a savage beast, and whose hands had pro-

bably been dyed in blood before. *You* were that man, Patrick Daly !'

It was well for Colonel Pendleton that, from the moment he entered the room, he was prepared for any consequences. At a single bound, Daly was upon him, with a low growl which was scarcely human in its sound. At the first rush, the colonel was hurled to the door, Daly grasping him by the throat with one hand, while with the other he endeavoured to wrest the knife from him. He was younger than the colonel, and his strength was greater, but the soldier was dexterous, wily, and agile ; by a tremendous effort he managed to loosen the grip of Daly upon his throat, and then, by a movement which he had been taught by an Indian in the West, he flung his antagonist to the floor. But Daly clung to him with terrible tenacity, and for a few moments the two were rolling

over each other, Daly making desperate struggles now and then to reach the revolver. At last a cry of triumph broke from him—he had torn the knife away from the colonel, making a ghastly wound in his hand as he did so, for he had seized a portion of the blade ; but, although his fingers were cut to the bone, he never relaxed his hold. Then he cast off his assailant, and stretched out his hand for the revolver. But the colonel was once more too quick for him. In an instant Daly felt a hard blow upon his arm, and saw a flash of fire, and his right hand fell powerless by his side.

‘ *One!*’ said the colonel, coolly. ‘The first I have put through your arm—the next, if you oblige me to do it, goes through your head! Move but a step, and it will be your last move in this world.’

The barrel of the pistol was in a line

with Daly's eye; he could read in the colonel's face his death-warrant. The knife had dropped from his hand, and blood was flowing from that hand and from his arm. But he never wavered; his only thought now was, how to gain time.

‘Will you let me get that towel to bind round my arm?’ he said, pointing to it.

‘There it is,’ said the colonel, throwing it across to him, but neither altering the direction of his own pistol nor attempting to touch Daly's.

There were hurried steps upon the stairs, followed by an impatient rapping at the door. Daly listened intently, and a look of exultation came into his eyes. He had been expecting some such interruption as this almost from the first. Three members of the Irish secret brotherhood to which he belonged had warned him that he was being watched, and, if they really knew of

his danger now, he had no doubt they would save him. The summons to open the door came, then, from his friends. He took the key out of his pocket with his left hand and offered it to the colonel, who quietly rejected it.

‘You can open the door yourself, if you like,’ he said; ‘but, if these people outside have come to your rescue, I warn you that it will be useless. Dead or alive, you are my prisoner.’

Daly hesitated for a moment, and then, convinced that he recognised one of the voices outside as that of a friend, he flung open the door. He had scarcely done so when two men entered the room, followed by a third, who ran hastily to the colonel. The third was Rufus Snapper.

‘It seems to me that we have not come much too soon,’ said the Philadelphian looking round the room and noticing the

confusion caused by the recent struggle.

Daly was disappointed, but not cowed. He made a rush for the door, but the officers whom Snapper had brought with him were on the alert.

‘One moment!’ exclaimed one of them, as he grasped Daly’s left arm and held it fast. He saw that the other arm was hanging helplessly.

‘Colonel,’ said the Irishman in a firm voice, ‘I was a fool just now. I ought to have taken your other shot. Will you do me one favour? Give it to me now, and finish up the business at once. Stand aside, you!’ he added, giving the policeman a kick that sent him to the other side of the room.

‘Now, colonel!’ he said, drawing himself up proudly, ‘put the next bullet where you threatened to put it a little while ago. Life for life is all you want—take mine and have done with it.’

The colonel half mechanically raised his pistol again, and seemed to be hesitating for a moment. Daly's eye never quailed. The policemen seemed to be too much surprised to move.

Once more the pistol was lowered.

'If we were on my own side of the Atlantic,' said the colonel, 'I might do it—but here they do not appreciate Judge Lynch.'

'You are a brave man yourself, colonel,' pleaded the Irishman. 'Alive or dead, you said. Let it be dead.'

'It is too late,' said the colonel, rather sorrowfully.

'Come along, my man,' exclaimed one of the officers, touching Daly by the elbow and leading him towards the door.

Daly gave one imploring look at the colonel, who merely laid his pistol down upon the table.

Another policeman was at the outer door with a cab. The colonel stood looking on while the party got in, and as they drove off he turned round to Rufus Snapper, and said, with a somewhat dejected air,

‘ He deserves his fate—no one better ; but I wish now that it had fallen to the lot of some one else to bring it upon his head. I will never make myself a minister of justice again !’

And together the two men walked in silence away.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRIAL.

THE Assizes were near at hand, and the colonel was informed that the necessity which lay upon him to give his evidence would not detain him in England very long. Moreover, it soon appeared from the preliminary examination before the magistrates that Daly's fate would not depend on Colonel Pendleton's testimony alone, for there were other fatal witnesses and a strong chain of facts, all pointing to one man as the murderer. Rufus Snapper fell off very greatly in his own estimation by reason of

the fact that he had not hit upon the right trail at first.

‘It all comes of having a theory of one’s own, and shutting one’s eyes to everything else,’ he remarked to the colonel, as they walked to the court together on the day of the trial. ‘I was convinced that Rafferty was the man, although Daly might have had something to do with it. So it was the forgery Master Sam was afraid of, after all?’

‘That was it—and even now he knows that a long term of imprisonment is hanging over his head. He and Finch well deserve it—no two greater scoundrels ever walked.’

‘Well, I suppose only one thing remains for me,’ said Snapper, rather crestfallen—
‘to find out what relation Sam Rafferty is to Mrs. Martin.’

‘And suppose she is none at all?’ quietly suggested the colonel.

‘Why, then, I may as well give up the detective line of business altogether. But you don’t mean to say I am wrong about that too?’

‘I will not say anything about it one way or the other, at present. Come along and let us get this ugly business over. I never had to help in dragging a man to the gallows before, and I don’t half like it now. I shall be glad when I am out of it all.’

They sat down together in the court, and soon began to watch the proceedings with keen interest.

Among the first of the witnesses called was Thomas Finch. At the outset he was a little nervous, but as he gradually saw that the questions did not compromise him

in any way, he became quite at home in the box. He could only say that Rafferty was considerably in debt to Daly, and that the latter had been promised his money when old Mr. Clavering died. Snapper listened to this tale with impatience, and was disgusted when he found that no enquiries were put to Finch touching his own misdeeds.

Then Rafferty was called, and the prisoner, who had displayed an indifferent bearing, seemed for the first time to realise his danger. The witness was at great pains to avoid meeting the Irishman's glance. It was true, said Rafferty, that he owed Daly a good deal of money—true also that he had frequently promised to pay him when old Mr. Clavering died. He had always believed that his mother would then come in for a large fortune, and that she would release him from his liabilities

—she had led him to anticipate that over and over again, and he had told Daly so. Daly often questioned him on the subject, and he (Rafferty) had invariably led him to expect payment in full when the old squire died. His mother was to make everything all right.

‘You have, in fact, levied toll upon your mother for years?’ began Daly’s counsel.

‘She had kept me in money, of course,’ replied Sam, angrily.

‘That was all she was good for, I suppose, in your eyes? And you believed you were to be made rich when old Mr. Clavering died?’

‘I thought I should be pretty well off.’

‘So that you had a direct interest in Mr. Clavering’s death?’

‘If you like to put it so, you can.’

‘You never heard the prisoner threaten Mr. Clavering at any time?’

‘Well, no,’ said Rafferty, but in a somewhat hesitating tone.

‘But you had a very good reason, as you thought, for not wishing old Mr. Clavering a particularly long life?’

‘I never wished to have him killed,’ replied Sam, doggedly.

‘And of course you never suggested any such idea to others?’

‘Never—why should I?’

‘You never had any conversation on the subject with the prisoner?’

‘Not till after the murder was committed.’

Then Rafferty went on to say that he had repeatedly been threatened by Daly, and that consequently he had kept out of the way as much as possible. He was afraid of Daly, especially since the murder, and since they had both found out that the old squire did not leave much money

to his wife. When Daly saw that he was not to be paid, he became more violent and more vindictive than ever. The witness was shown the knife which Colonel Pendleton had picked up on the night of the murder. He said he had often seen it in Daly's possession—had noticed him cutting up tobacco with it. Daly was not in his own lodgings at Birmingham on the night of the murder, and he did not return there till two or three days afterwards.

‘He is not telling so much as he might do,’ whispered the colonel to Rufus Snapper. ‘He knew all the time who had committed the murder, and he was too much afraid of Daly to say anything. But Daly was getting dangerous towards the last, and this fellow Rafferty would before long have set the police upon him. Now he is trying to affect ignorance of the whole matter.’

‘Have you and Finch ever had any dealings together?’

Rafferty felt an inward tremor come over him when the counsel put this question.

‘It must all come out now,’ he said to himself, and his lips were dry and his voice husky as he answered:

‘A little money matter now and then—nothing to speak of.’

‘You borrowed money of him, then, as well as of the prisoner?’

‘Not exactly,’ replied Rafferty, with a faint smile.

‘But you had business together?’

‘A little commission business; it did not answer, and we stopped it.’

‘Did he pay the commission, or did you?’

This question opened Rafferty’s eyes to the fact that his persecutor had no suspicion of the true nature of the ‘business’

which had been carried on with Finch. He looked at the lawyer sharply, saw him gathering up his papers, and felt confident that he was safe.

‘I got some orders for him for stationery,’ said he, coolly, ‘and he paid me a small commission. It never amounted to much. He was only in a small way himself, and soon broke down altogether.’

‘You can go,’ Rafferty heard some one say, and, with a chuckle over the stupidity of lawyers and his own good luck, he hastily retreated.

‘Got off this time,’ said Rufus Snapper, in a low tone; ‘he will not escape me quite so easily.’ But what are you looking at so intently, colonel? Is there anything wrong?’

Colonel Pendleton made no reply, but the Philadelphian followed the direction of his friend’s eyes, and saw that they were

fixed upon a woman dressed in black, who was sitting close by Daly's solicitor. Her appearance showed that she was of good station, and Rufus Snapper wondered—as others in the court had done—what had brought her into intimate relations with the prisoner.

Colonel Pendleton had noticed her from the first; something in her pale face had interested him; he saw there a look of suspense, sometimes almost of anguish, such as only the keenest anxiety and fear could have occasioned. Once or twice the prisoner had handed down little notes to his solicitor, whose clerk, standing just below the dock, received and passed them on. The woman evidently followed each of these movements with deep attention—the note folded up very small by the prisoner, handed to the clerk, passed on to the solicitor, who sometimes sent back a

question or a reply in the same manner. No stage in this process seemed to escape the watchful eyes of the woman, especially as the trial went on, and as the case assumed a blacker aspect against the accused. At the close of the day, Colonel Pendleton asked the solicitor who the lady was.

‘The prisoner’s wife,’ replied the lawyer, in a compassionate tone. ‘She was a lady—why she married *him*, Heaven only knows. It is a bad look-out for her if she cares anything about him, as I suppose she does, or she would not be here.’

‘She listens to every word as if her own life depended upon it,’ remarked the colonel, more to himself than to the solicitor. ‘It is a pity she cannot be persuaded not to come here at all.’

‘No one could do that. I got permission for her to sit near me, in case she had anything to suggest in the course of the trial.

Daly sent down several questions to-day; we put most of them to the witnesses, but I cannot see that they made his case much better. It looks ugly for him—I wouldn't give much for his chance.'

The lawyer patted his papers complacently as he tied them up, and the colonel walked with Rufus Snapper back to the hotel. Both were unusually silent during dinner, and it was only when they had lit their cigars that the Philadelphian spoke.

'Colonel,' he said, 'if that miserable creature, Rafferty, gets arrested for forging young Clavering's name on those cheques—or helping to do it—the mother will be disgraced, and the memory of your old friend, the squire, will to some extent be involved in the disgrace. The whole Clavering family will be mixed up in the scandal. All this never occurred to me till this afternoon.'

‘What can be done?’ said the colonel, after a long pause.

‘It’s rather hard to say,’ replied Snapper. ‘I had made up my mind to get Rafferty arrested, as well as Finch, for my candid opinion is that the sooner both are in jail the better. Perhaps, if Rafferty could slip out of the country, it might be as well for his mother; I cannot help feeling rather sorry for her.’

‘Do you think it could be managed?’ asked the colonel, heartily approving of the scheme.

‘I think it can be tried,’ replied Snapper, cautiously; ‘to begin with, I had better be off to London to-night by the mail train; I can do no more good here.’

‘But why be in such a hurry? At least you might wait until the trial is over.’

‘There is no time to lose; the fact is, I have already set part of the machinery in

motion, and it must be stopped now, if at all. Finch must not be allowed to get off scot-free ; after all, he is the prime mover in the whole business. But we might let Rafferty go, if a hint would do it ; only it must not come from me. In any case you will go straight to London as soon as this trial is ended ?’

‘Of course—but recollect that we go home together this day week.’

‘What, to Virginia ?’

‘You have known that all along,’ said the colonel, smiling at his friend’s dismayed look. ‘How many times have we settled it together ? We were only to wait for this trial ; and I would not have waited for that if I could have helped myself.’

‘I cannot get ready to accompany you so soon as you talk of,’ said Snapper, gravely.

‘I promised the little girl I would, but I did not realise that you meant to be off

almost directly. I shall have to join you in New York, or at your own place, a little later on.'

'You must settle all that with Edith; you know what you have promised her. I leave you to get out of it if you can.'

The friends shook hands and parted, but it was long before the colonel found rest. On the next day he was aware that he would be called upon to give his evidence against Daly, and he dreaded the ordeal. But, when the time came, he went through it as he had always performed every act of duty, and called forth a warm eulogium from the judge for the gallantry he had shown in arresting the prisoner. Great as was the colonel's horror of the crime which had been committed, and his detestation of the murderer, he somehow or other could not bear, while he was in the witness-box, to look at the pale woman in

black who, as he instinctively felt, never took her eyes from his face.

Daly was cool and unconcerned throughout. Occasionally, however, he wrote a hurried note, as he had done the day before, and once or twice his solicitor sent back a reply, or perhaps a question. The colonel observed that these messages sometimes passed through the hands of Daly's wife, who passed them to the clerk close by the dock. A thought struck the colonel which made his pulse bound ; but he said nothing.

Everybody had felt for some hours that the trial could have but one end. When the last witness had been examined, it almost seemed as if the governor of the jail—a tall, stern-looking figure, in a long military cloak, standing at the back of the dock from time to time,—might have been

the executioner, waiting impatiently for his victim.

The counsel for the defence was speaking when the colonel thought he noticed, for the first time, a look exchanged between the prisoner and his wife. On the part of the prisoner, it was a look of eager questioning; on the part of the woman, there was a signal of sorrowful acquiescence. It all passed in a flash, and for a moment or two afterwards the woman's paleness seemed to increase, and the colonel fancied that she was about to faint. No one but himself had observed this brief incident, and he was afraid of calling attention to the woman by making any movement towards her. He saw her cast one swift glance around the court, and then she wrote a few words on a slip of paper, which she handed to the prisoner's solicitor.

He leaned across, and the colonel heard him say to her,

‘ You can have it handed to him if you like, but it is too late to put any questions now.’

‘ But he could mention it to the judge,’ she pleaded, in earnest tones. ‘ Pray, pray let me send it to him.’

‘ Of course there is no objection,’ said the solicitor, passing the note back to her. ‘ Give it to my clerk.’

She took back the slip of paper, and handed it to the clerk, who passed it up to the prisoner in the dock. Thus, to anyone looking on, it appeared to come straight from the solicitor himself. Quickly as it was all done, nothing had escaped the notice of Colonel Pendleton ; and he could have sworn that the note passed on by the woman, and now in the prisoner’s hand,

was *not* the same which she had first handed to the lawyer.

As for Daly, he seemed intent upon following the eloquent address of his counsel, at this instant making a pathetic allusion to the wife of the unhappy man whose existence trembled in the balance. So absorbed was Daly in this speech, that he merely glanced at the outside of the piece of paper, and either in forgetfulness, or in consequence of the strain which was evidently bearing heavily even on his iron nerves, he crushed it in his hand, and the colonel, always watching with intense interest, saw that he had rolled it between his fingers, and that, under cover of stroking his moustache, he had passed it into his mouth. Then, if he had any doubt before, the colonel knew perfectly well what sort of message it was which the poor wife had

sent to the doomed man, and a pang of sorrowful sympathy went through his heart for them both. But the woman sat with her head bowed, and her hands clenched tightly; her eyes seemed to be turned to stone, so unconscious were they of anything they rested upon. There was a dreadful look of suffering in them which made the colonel's blood run cold.

The judge, by way of 'holding the scales of justice even,' delivered a much more impassioned harangue against the prisoner than the opposing counsel had done, and the jury retired. Still the woman did not change her position. A quarter of an hour had passed—half-an-hour—and then she looked up suddenly, and a gleam of hope seemed to irradiate her sad face. Daly stood still—they had offered him a seat, but he had taken no notice. Now, as the

woman turned towards him, a faint smile passed over his lips ; he understood the hope that had come to her, the hope that he would yet escape—that the jury would not find him guilty ; but he shook his head slightly, and the colonel saw his lips move as if he were uttering one word, ‘*Forgive,*’ or ‘*Farewell.*’ The woman seemed to comprehend both look and word, and the dreadful expression of wild, tearless despair came back into her eyes.

The jury returned ; there were the usual formalities, which occupy a few minutes, and seem to be consuming hours. Then came the verdict—that which everybody had looked for. The prisoner stood erect, and received his sentence with a calmness which astonished everybody but Colonel Pendleton.

The wife seemed to be stunned. She

was not conscious when the prisoner was removed ; presently she looked round, and, finding that he was gone, she gave one long deep sigh, and staggered to her feet. Colonel Pendleton was almost instantly by her side.

‘Let me help you,’ he said, gently ; ‘a carriage is at the door——’

She looked at him with a shudder, recognising in him one of the witnesses against her husband. She shrank back from him as if in terror.

‘I could not help doing what I did,’ said the colonel, pityingly, ‘and, even if I had not been here, the result would have been the same. What *you* have done will soon save him from the worst.’

As he uttered these words, the woman looked up startled—a new dread was evidently in her heart. But the colonel laid his hand lightly upon her arm, and said,

‘I am going at once from this place ; you have nothing to fear from me. May heaven be good to you !’

Before she knew what had happened, he had slipped a little packet into her hand, and was gone.

That night, when the colonel reached London, he heard some strange news. The newspaper boys were crying it about the streets ; it was posted up, with the rest of the long strip which told of the day’s occurrences, in the colonel’s club. The prisoner, whom he had seen sentenced to death a few hours before, had gone to his great account before his time. An hour or two after his removal to the condemned cell, he was taken suddenly ill, and the prison doctor was summoned. The gaoler, who had never left him after the conclusion of the trial, had fancied the prisoner was unwell even before he left the court, but

it was not by any means unusual for a condemned murderer to look pale and nervous directly after his doom was pronounced.

After reaching his cell, the prisoner sat down wearily, a spasm of pain passed across his face, and he asked for water. Then came a deadly sickness, followed by stupor. The doctor was baffled ; everybody was in confusion. In the midst of it all, the prisoner opened his eyes once, smiled feebly, said ‘ good-bye,’ and died.

They found that he had taken a dose of aconite sufficient to kill ten men, though how he had concealed it about him, or where he had obtained it, no one could explain.

‘ He might have hidden it somewhere in the lining of his clothes,’ suggested Snapper a few days afterwards. ‘ He wore the same clothes he was arrested in till he was

a condemned man. It would not have been so difficult to hide the poison.'

'I daresay you are right,' replied the colonel, briefly, for he seemed to be particularly desirous not to pursue the subject any farther. He had no inclination to confide even to his closest friend the secret which he had discovered on the last day of the trial, nor did he tell Rufus Snapper that the packet which he had handed to the prisoner's wife contained bank notes for two hundred and fifty pounds.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LEAVE-TAKING.

EDITH PENDLETON had been impatient for the day when her father would be free to set out with her on the homeward journey to Virginia, and many were the questions she put concerning the old house, which, though surrounded in her mind with mere childish recollections, had always held its place in her affections.

‘I really do not know much about it,’ replied Snapper to one of these questions. ‘You forget that I never saw the Pendleton homestead.’

‘And yet you are so great a friend of papa’s?’

‘Very true, but, the larger part of the time that *you* were there, it would not have been very safe for me to have gone into that part of the country. I was an Abolitionist, and they would have ridden me on a rail. Snake fences are mighty handy down there, I believe.’

‘And so you let a trifle like that stop you!’

‘Well, a ride on a rail, as they managed it in the old days, was not exactly a trifle; but, besides that, there was an affair going on which made travelling in a southerly direction a little awkward. You seem to forget, young lady, that there was such a thing as a war about that time.’

‘Indeed I do not—the poor wounded soldiers were always being carried past our house, and everybody was in mourning. I

was very young, but I am not likely ever to forget those scenes.'

'So that was how it happened I never paid you a visit in those days,' continued Snapper. 'In fact, we did not know each other, your father and I, so well as we do now. There were two sides to that big fight—he was on one, and I was on the other. Give me any kind of war but a civil war, if we must have one, but I was brought up in the city of Quakers, and so I am a man of peace. We do not want any more wars on our side of the water; let us leave that sort of thing to these quarrelsome people in Europe.'

'And now they say there never was any necessity for our war at all.'

'So a good many of us said at the time, if it comes to that,' replied Snapper, with a grim smile, as he thought of the 'Copper-heads;' 'but we poor mortals are not always

able to control events. It had to come—so it was written in the book of fate from the first moment we started on our course; but I wish it had not come in my day. I am like your father—I cannot get it out of my mind; I wake up in the morning with a great melancholy over me, and, when I am fully aroused, I know it is *that*.'

Snapper, perhaps, said this partly to explain a singular heaviness of spirit which had lately fallen upon him, and which the young girl did not fail to notice.

'Did you lose many friends in the war, Mr. Snapper?' she asked.

'Do not ask me about that,' he said, with a sudden change of manner—'do not let us talk about those sad times at all, especially now that you are going away. It is quite hard enough to bear this parting, without raking over the ashes of the old one.'

‘Well, Mr. Snapper, you must come with us, and then you will forget all your troubles.’

‘There could not be a pleasanter remedy, but at my time of life we never expect anything pleasant. I cannot go with you.’

‘That is all nonsense,’ said the young girl, laughing at his grave face.

‘It is the hardest kind of sense—what we call *horse* sense. I have business in hand that cannot be neglected. I can assure you that I am not by any means my own master.’

‘Always the same story,’ said Edith, slyly, anxious to turn her old friend’s thoughts from the approaching parting, which she could see he dreaded. ‘Pray who *is* your master, since you are not? Can you tell me that?’

‘Well, I think I could,’ replied Snapper, with a twinkle of the eye.

‘And where is the lady now?’

‘Did I say anything about a lady? It must have slipped out unawares if I did.’

‘No, you are too cunning; but you see I know all about it. It has been going on a long time now; you are really very slow, for an American! Why did you not manage it so that we might all have gone back to America together?’

‘If I had thought of that, it might have been done,’ said Snapper, with so serious an air that for a moment Edith half fancied there might be more to warrant her banter than she had before suspected. After all, why should not Rufus Snapper get married? Much older men than he did so every day. He was rich, and Edith was not quite so unversed in the world’s ways as not to know that riches count for something in a man’s favour at any time—especially when he is old.

‘At any rate, you promise to come out to Virginia to see us?’

‘Oh, yes, that’s quite understood. My old admirers there can get the tar and feathers ready. I will finish up my business here first of all; then I intend to go and stay a little while with a friend of ours who is not very happy just now.’

Edith’s countenance altered; she divined at once the meaning of the Philadelphian’s remark, and noticed that his voice trembled a little.

‘I know what you mean, Uncle Rufus,’ she said, going up close to him. ‘We need not make any mystery about it now. My father has told me all.’

‘I am very glad of it,’ rejoined Snapper, greatly relieved, ‘for I am a bad hand at explanations. So you know all? Then you know that he is going to live abroad—and perhaps it is the best thing he can

do, all circumstances considered. It is only of late that I have come to know him well, and to see the sort of stuff he is made of. It is genuine, or I am much mistaken. He has been deceived, but never the deceiver ! I would stake my life on that !'

Edith's eyes sparkled, but she said not a word. Rufus Snapper understood her quite as well as if she had expressed every thought that was passing in her mind.

'I am always sorry,' he said, 'for the youngster who goes out into the world knowing nothing at all about it, and without a father's warning voice to guard him against the places where the *traps* are set. To be sure, the warning does no good, very often ; but Geoffrey Clavering might have been saved. As it is, they have done their best to destroy him among them. Now tell me, Edith,' continued Snapper, again hesitating for a moment and then

hurrying on—‘if he were to ask to see you before you go—if——’

‘He has asked,’ said the colonel’s daughter, with a smile which was an immense relief to the Philadelphian. ‘He has written to papa—I thought he had told you. I do not know all that he said; papa only read a part of the letter. But he begged he might see us again before we went away, and of course we said yes—what do you take us for?’ There was a heightened colour in the young girl’s cheeks, and a firm look in her eyes, which somewhat puzzled Snapper. ‘Do you think I can ever forget my life at Porthcawl Castle? Or that I do not know who was the real victim in that dreadful marriage?’

‘My dear, I——’

‘Yes, I understand. You suppose that, because a girl knows very little about the

world, she does not think about the things she sees going on in it. We really do think at times, Mr. Snapper, and perhaps see a great deal further than you men suppose. When I heard of that marriage, it seemed to me as if I must have died; but you see I did not, and, now that I know all about it, my sympathies are entirely with poor Geoffrey. So are yours, my dear old friend—I know it!’

She held out her hand to Snapper, and he bent over and kissed it. There was a strangely troubled look in his face which escaped Edith’s notice, and Snapper turned away to gain a moment’s time. Evidently, he was deeply moved.

‘Let me tell you something else,’ continued Edith, less observant than usual; ‘I never wanted you to go away from me—but now, if you do not go in less than five minutes, you will meet Geoffrey.’

‘Where?’ asked Snapper, looking round astonished.

‘Where *should* he be but here? Is not that what you wished? My father told him he might come when he pleased, and so it was settled. Are you not contented?’

She again went up to him, and looked in his face. The Philadelphian had to exercise all his power of self-control to meet her with a smile.

‘Perfectly,’ he said, as he made for the door; ‘of course it is exactly what I wished.’

‘But there seems to be a cloud over you,’ said Edith, following him rather anxiously.

‘No, no,’ said Snapper, gaily, ‘I have not been so well satisfied with myself and all the world for months past. Perhaps, after all, you will not go back to Virginia?’

‘Of course we shall ; nothing has happened to change our plans.’

Snapper looked down thoughtfully, and again the grave look stole over his face.

‘Of course not,’ said he, suddenly ; ‘I was only thinking of what I should like the best. I hate to part with you ; but I suppose your father has acted wisely.’

‘Oh, I am very sure of that !’

‘Then that is all right,’ said Snapper, smiling at the young girl’s warmth. ‘Do not be afraid—I am off. You will not be so hard upon this poor young fellow who is coming as you are upon me?’

There was something in his tone and look which puzzled the young girl ; but he went without another word, and she sat down to think. She had never seen Rufus Snapper in that mood before. She was still pondering over it, when a servant opened the door and announced the visitor

for whom she had been so impatiently waiting, although he was even then a minute or two before his time.

She rose and received him almost as if they had never parted. Nothing could be more natural to her than that Geoffrey Clavering should be seated there by her side.

They talked of indifferent things, as people so placed must needs do; there was but one subject which both avoided. Yet they felt themselves irresistibly drawn to it. There was a momentary silence, and then Edith said,

‘My father will be back soon—he must see you before you go. It may be the last opportunity he will have.’

The words struck upon Clavering’s ear like a knell.

‘The last!’ he repeated, mechanically.
‘But you are not going yet?’

‘Very soon—we have much to do, and it is better so.’

She tried to keep her voice steady, but her own ear detected a tremor in it, and it was not lost upon Geoffrey.

‘There can be little temptation for you to remain in England, I must admit,’ he said, in a moody tone.

‘We were very happy here,’ said Edith, almost to herself, and with an abstracted expression in her look. ‘Indeed, it seems to me that all the really happy part of my life has been passed in England. Nothing of that sort lasts very long, the books say, and I suppose they are right.’

Her tone, too, had a tinge of sadness in it, and she looked forward into vacancy with eyes that seemed to be all unconscious of what was going on around them.

‘It is my fault,’ exclaimed Clavering, impetuously; ‘if it had not been for

my madness, you would never have left us.'

'At any rate, we shall never forget the dear old pleasant days,' replied the young girl, in a low voice; 'it is something, at least, to have had one's youth happy. Mine had scarcely a dark day in it, after I came to know you all—till—till your poor father's death. I will think of *that* part of my life henceforth—it will never be less dear to me than it is now.'

Geoffrey, by a sudden impulse, seemed to be about to take her hand, but something in her manner restrained him. It was evident that his movement had been unseen by her. She seemed to have passed into womanhood all at once; there was a dignity in her bearing which Clavering seemed to fancy he had never seen before.

'I begin to think life is a mistake altogether,' said he; 'it would have been better

for me—for all of us—if I had been taken from it instead of my father.'

'We cannot tell until all is over. We have to go on doing our duty.'

'That is what Colonel Pendleton always tells me.'

'I have learnt it from him; now I begin to understand all that he means by it. Poor father! What are our trials, after all, compared with what he has gone through! Let him be an example to you, Geoffrey,' said she, with proud sadness, 'as he will be to me. He will teach us how to endure bravely; that will be something gained.'

Her manner impressed Clavering in a way that he could not have explained. It was as if some strong and lofty religious influence were being exerted over him.

'You are the noblest creature in the world, Edith,' he said, as he stood gazing upon her—'even now, after all that has

happened, you have not a single harsh word for me, and I have deserved so many !’

‘No—you are not all to blame. It is not for me to blame you, even if you were.’

‘There is no such mercy in the judgment I pronounce upon myself! For you—to have spared you a moment’s annoyance—I would have sacrificed my life! And now see where I am and what I have done.’ He got up and walked about the room impatiently, as his father used to do, Edith well remembered. ‘Fool, fool!’ he exclaimed. ‘If some one had put a pistol to my head long ago, it would have been a mercy!’

‘I cannot have you talk like that, Geoffrey—it is unworthy of you, of us all. Let us not make this last meeting more bitter than it need be.’

Her look softened as she spoke, though her words seemed cold.

‘ You are right, Edith—once more, I ask your forgiveness. There is but one thing I can do now, since you are going—it is to go away too, far beyond the reach of these people ! They will not regret my absence,’ he went on, scornfully, ‘ provided I enter into their ideas about money—into *his*, perhaps I ought to say, for as to the woman—you know whom I mean—*my wife* !’—the tone of misery in which he uttered these two words brought the tears to Edith’s eyes—‘ she has never troubled me much since my marriage, that I must admit. It was only an annuity my worthy father-in-law was in search of, as he has often told me—and he found it. Of course it shall be kept up, and thus I secure my freedom, such as it is. They go their way, and I mine—such is the family compact. What

does it signify to them if my life is ruined?’

‘Your life is not ruined, Geoffrey; you will recover from all this. I think you are right to travel for a time, but after that you must enter into active life. You have duties to perform.’

‘I should take no interest in them. My best plan will be to go abroad.’

‘That is what all the failures say,’ replied Edith, ‘and you are not a failure. Do not class yourself with the broken-down cheats and knaves.’

‘For your sake, I will do my best,’ said Clavering, after a pause. ‘But I scarcely know where to begin.’

‘Well, there is your estate——’

‘Yes, while they leave it to me. But you forget that even in Wales we may have a Land League.’

‘Porthcawl will not fall into its hands just yet, Geoffrey.’

A feeling of constraint had fallen upon them both, and it was almost with a sense of relief that Edith thought she heard her father’s voice below. And yet the grief of parting lay heavy at her heart.

There was silence for a few moments, and then Edith knew that Geoffrey had come to her side, and was standing over her chair.

‘At least let me go away feeling that you have forgiven me, Edith!’ He spoke in faltering accents; the young girl looked up and saw that a great sadness was in his soul.

‘You know that I have done so—with all my heart,’ she replied, and a sigh forced itself from her lips.

In a moment, Geoffrey had fallen on his knees at her feet; he had taken her un-

resisting hands in his own, and was covering them with kisses.

‘To have you think that I wilfully deceived you,’ he said, looking up into her radiant face, ‘to have you doubt that I have loved you always—as boy, youth, and man—that would be the bitterest pang of all to me even now. Blind and reckless I have been, but not false or treacherous! I may never see you again, Edith, but to the last I shall remain unchanged—I love you, and have never loved any but you! That is my religion, if you like—I will take it with me to my grave!’

The colonel’s daughter stood up pale and trembling. Her lips moved slightly, but Geoffrey Clavering could not hear her words, if she uttered any. He seemed to be swept away by the storm which was raging within him.

‘I ought not to tell you this now,’ he

went on, in the same strenuous way, 'but you are going from me—perhaps for ever—and you must hear the truth. I cannot be chained for the rest of my life to misery without saying one word to her who alone has given me a gleam of happiness! The sun shines where you are; presently I shall pass out into the darkness again, but for these brief moments my eyes can rest upon your sweet form, and I can tell you what is in my heart, and what will be there till it ceases to beat—that I love you beyond all and above all! If it had not been for *that*, my troubles, my remorse, would have driven me mad.'

She looked at him now without shrinking. It was indeed their last meeting—why should she, as she had said, add to its bitterness? She would not be his judge.

'I will go now,' he said, almost overpowered by the tenderness of her eyes,

‘ with my eternal gratitude for suffering me thus to leave you—never will you fade from my vision as I see you now. You have forgiven me ; that is enough ! Sometimes you will think of one whose first and last thoughts will be with you, and your gentle pity will soften my lot, even though twenty oceans rolled between us ! Let these people do their worst ; they cannot drive me to despair, for I know that you forgive all, and that I may think of you as you were in the old days—as you will be to me till my poor days are all over.’

Almost without knowing what he did, he sprang to her side, and drew her to him, and looked into her eyes with all the intensity of long restrained and irresistible passion. Thus they stood, for one brief moment, breathless, silent, oblivious of time past and of all the circumstances that

surrounded them. Then the young man's lips touched her forehead, and with one last effort he tore himself away, and there was no other farewell to utter.

CHAPTER IX.

‘NO OTHER WAY.’

As soon as Daly's trial was over, Finch hurried back to London, having a decided objection to remaining in or about a court of law a moment longer than was necessary. He arrived home rather late, for he had made many halts on the way from the railway-station, chewing the cud of fancy as he went along, and moistening it freely with gin-and-water. By the time he reached the dirty little court in Garlick Hill, he was tired and out of temper; his hat had fallen on to the back of his head, and the

jauntiness of his gait was gone. Matters were not at all improved when he found that his daughter was sitting up for him. She was always in the way when she was not wanted. Finch had kept up an intermittent quarrel with her ever since her sudden raid upon Porthcawl Castle—not for going there, but for coming back again. Why on earth did she not stay, while she was about it, and send for him, her good and kind father, to join her? His wrongs rankled afresh in his mind as he entered the room, and he jammed his hat defiantly upon the table.

‘So you have been enjoying yourself again, father,’ said the daughter, in the tone which Finch particularly disliked.

‘No thanks to you,’ he grunted. ‘It would not matter a straw to you if your poor old father died of starvation.’

‘I don’t know about starvation,’ replied

the woman, with a hard smile, 'but he will never die of thirst.'

'Not if he can help it,' said Finch, tickled at the thought. 'I think I can manage to keep my clay moist, at least while Geoffrey is alive.'

The woman turned round sharply, but, before she could speak, Finch managed to turn aside the awkward question which was upon her lips.

'I have been to Daly's trial,' said he—'of course you have not heard anything about it. How should you, when you never condescend to look at a newspaper? It was the rummest go you ever saw! Daly was found guilty—I pretty soon saw there was no help for *that*!—and he was sentenced too, but he managed to slip through their fingers after all. Clever fellow, was Daly, but not quite clever enough. He made

sure that he would rake in a pot of money over old Clavering's death, and I daresay Sam Rafferty quietly egged him on to kill the squire; but you see they were disappointed all round—the widow didn't get much, Sam Rafferty less, and Daly nothing at all. That wasn't a paying job. I prefer my own line.'

‘What line do you mean? You have so many.’

Finch looked up cunningly, and shook his head. He took up a bottle, in which there still remained a glassful of spirit, poured it out, and tossed it off at a gulp. This dose seemed to put him in a good humour with himself once more.

‘So Daly is gone,’ said he, puffing away at the end of a cigar; ‘I suppose he thought it was better to travel by his own road than by the other! He never cared a

snap of the finger for life, his own or anybody else's. What a pity your husband does not take it into his head to follow Daly's example. I suppose you would at least claim something as his widow ?'

'I will take nothing more from him or his. I have told you so a thousand times.'

'So you have, Emily,' said Finch, in a sarcastic tone, 'but I don't agree with your way of looking at it. It isn't reasonable. Women are not usually generous towards anybody who is in their power—you are an exception. Well, now, if you won't let your husband support you, he *shall* support me. I made up my mind to that long ago. What's the good of having a rich son-in-law if you are not to live upon him? What was he sent into the world for?'

‘You have made Geoffrey Clavering pay you pretty well thus far,’ said the woman, eyeing him shrewdly.

‘How do you know that?’ asked Finch, a little alarmed. ‘Has that fellow Rafferty been saying anything to you? If I thought he had, I should be half inclined to take a leaf out of Daly’s book.’

He clenched his fists angrily, and looked fierce, but the woman only laughed.

‘It will not be the *last* leaf,’ said she, bitterly.

‘No,’ chuckled Finch—‘at least while your husband is here to make things pleasant for me. He has done that for some time,’ he continued, drink and anger now making him thoroughly reckless. ‘Do you think I was going to let him play the fool with me as he did with you? Not if I could help it.’

His daughter listened with eager atten-

tion to every word, but Finch no longer paid any heed to her.

‘That time you went to Porthcawl Castle, I thought there would be no more necessity for me to put on the screw. But you disappointed me, Emily—you behaved badly to one who has done so much for you! If you had played your game properly, I might now be living in a castle, waited upon by a row of warders, or senechals, or whatever they call the fellows in plush. As it is, I am reduced to drinking cold gin and smoking the stump of a cigar which I picked up in the street.’

He glanced at his daughter, who seemed to be plunged in a fit of thought.

‘By Jove,’ muttered Finch, ‘she is thinking better of it at last. I shall bring her round after all.’

‘The fact is, Emily,’ said he aloud, ‘if we could only hit it off together for once,

we should go on as smoothly as clockwork, and enjoy ourselves better than ever.'

'We might as easily do that and have nothing to boast of,' replied Mrs. Martin, with her hard laugh.

'That's so; but whose fault is it? There has been a lot of money lying under your feet, and you won't pick it up. So I picked up some of it for you, my girl—I, Thomas Finch, though only a drunken sot, as some people think—I stood over and protected you.' (The sound of his own voice, as usual, excited him; he went on talking without the least restraint or fear.) 'I made your husband fork out; sometimes it came as a loan, sometimes I helped myself.'

'I don't understand you,' said the woman, who was now very pale, and whose voice was trembling with suppressed passion or excitement.

'Well then, let me tell you all about it,'

said Finch, rubbing his hands, and feeling quite satisfied that he had won over his daughter at last. ‘You see, it was not always easy to get hold of my gentleman. I went to his rooms night after night without finding him. At last, one lucky evening, I told the servant I would wait for him. A bright idea struck me—why not get a few of his cheques and fill them up for him? You know my cleverness in imitating other people’s hand-writing. There were plenty of his letters to you in your drawer over there. I knew you wouldn’t mind my borrowing one or two for so good a purpose. They were written before your marriage, when we could gammon the simpleton into anything we liked. What a lucky thing it was,’ he added, checking himself suddenly, ‘that he never knew anything of the other fellow—your first husband! My game would have been

up pretty soon! For, you may depend upon it, Joe Martin is not dead. He went to Australia, so everybody said, and very likely it was true. I only hope he won't turn up again—if he did, he might prosecute you for bigamy, by Jove!

The woman still said not a word, but, if Finch had not been more than half drunk, he would have seen something in the expression of her face which would have induced him to pause in his revelations. But he still went on without regarding her.

'Very pretty letters they were, of the sort—just enough of love in them to sweeten them up a bit, and show what a fool he was. Well, I copied his signature—the love part is not worth much now either to you or me. First I wrote his signature on some plain paper, and then at the foot of a cheque. It was a modest little amount

that I filled it in for ; only ten pounds. Sam Rafferty got it cashed. I lived on the proceeds—*you* lived on them’—(here the woman shivered, as if she were cold, and tears filled her large dark eyes)—‘we all had a go at them. Presently we got hard up again—same dodge ; more money. At last we were found out ; how it happened I never could understand. Then they threatened me with prosecution, but I relied upon you, Emily, to pull me through, and you *did*.’

‘I did?’ said the woman, in a tone scarcely above a whisper.

‘Certainly. Could Clavering prosecute the father of his dear wife? Out of the question! Besides, he likes me—though sometimes he has a queer way of showing it. I am sure he has a regard for you, Emily, badly as you treated him.’

‘And for my sake he forgave you?’

‘Just so. Now think what you *might* have got out of him if you had only tried. There is nothing you could not have done. But it is not too late even now, my girl, if you will only be guided by me. There’s plenty of corn in Egypt—more than ever. Now be reasonable—’ he staggered over to her, and put his hand on her shoulder—‘go back to Porthcawl, and take me with you this time. That American girl has cleared out, they say—at any rate she has no business there, and you have! Let’s go to-morrow; the sooner you take the plunge the better.’

The daughter rose up from her chair, and walked slowly towards her bed-room, holding her hand to her heart as if she were in pain. The humiliations she had undergone so many years all seemed to be burning into her soul; this last revelation of her father’s baseness, falling upon her,

as it did, when she was in failing health and broken spirits, filled her with a kind of leaden despair. She went into her room, and came out in a minute or two, haggard and bloodless in appearance, carrying in her hand a bonnet and a shawl.

‘She’s only just beginning to wake up to it all,’ Finch was saying to himself, with much satisfaction; ‘let her leave it to me, and I’ll make her fortune yet. She’s too soft, and always was. What a job I had to get her to go through that form of marriage with Clavering. Nothing but my persuading her that it would save us from prison, and set me on my legs again, induced her to fall in with the little plot. And she’s been regretting it ever since.’

He was roused from his reverie by his daughter’s voice.

‘Father, is it all true that you have been telling me, just now?’

‘True? Why, of course it is. Every word of it, and a good deal more too, if you only knew it. I tell you, you could get anything you liked out of that man, if you only played your cards properly.’

‘Is it true that you have been getting money from Geoffrey Clavering for years?’

‘Certainly, and I’m only sorry I could not get more. But let us work the thing together in future and we’ll get enough, never fear!’

‘You told him it was for me?’

‘Always. It made things so much pleasanter all round. Once or twice he was rather suspicious, and wanted to have a line from you authorising me to receive the money. But I soon shamed him out of that. “What, distrust *me*,” I said to him. “Would a father rob his own daughter?” And that sort of thing, you understand, had a great effect upon him.’

‘And, not satisfied with all that, you forged his name?’

‘I wrote his name at the foot of a cheque—or two.’

‘And that also he thinks was done to get money for *me* to spend?’

‘I daresay he does,’ said Finch, with a loud laugh.

‘May Heaven forgive you—and me too!’

She uttered these words in a low, broken voice as she moved from the table against which she had been leaning, in a faint and weary way, and noiselessly left the room. When Finch looked up, a few minutes afterwards, he was surprised to find that she was gone.

‘Emily, Emily!’ he called aloud, three or four times, but there was no answer. ‘Gone downstairs to see that sick woman again, I suppose,’ said he, as he threw himself upon his bed in the corner. ‘She

ought to have been a Sister of Charity instead of a great squire's wife. She's too good for this world. Nursing a sick woman night after night! Just like her mother—both of 'em cracked!

His drunken laugh again filled the room; in a minute or two he had sunk into a heavy sleep.

Meanwhile the daughter had passed from the house into the silent streets, at first walking slowly and aimlessly, but turning, after a time, down one of the narrow lanes, lined with tall warehouses, which led towards the river. It seemed that her brain was on fire; there were terrible throbbings and beatings in her head; her eyes felt as if they were full of blood.

'It is more than I can bear,' she kept repeating aloud, as if replying to some appeal or remonstrance, 'it is more than I can bear! My husband—my real husband

deserted me ; we have never heard of him since. Then I was forced into this fraudulent marriage. And now my father has been robbing Geoffrey for years, and in my name ! What shame ! what ignominy ! And all for what ? That he may sink deeper and deeper into drunkenness and ruin, and that I may be driven to starvation—or this !’

There was no one near to see or hear her ; the heart of the great city where she then stood had no life or movement in it. It was like a city of the dead.

‘ There is only one way of escape from all this disgrace and misery,’ she said, in piteous tones, still speaking as if some one stood beside her. ‘ You do not know all I have suffered these many years, and now I can endure no more. Oh, mother, mother ! He killed you by his cruelty and violence—I should have gone to you

long ago, but you seemed to be near, and waved me back. Keep me back no longer—let me come to you! Do not fear; I shall be forgiven *there*; in *His* eyes the sorrow is weighed against the sin. There is no other way of escape—how much better would it have been if I had taken it before!’

She wrung her poor hands together, as if still pleading her desperate cause with some one whose face shone upon her out of the darkness, and then there was a sullen sound from the river, and Finch waited for his daughter in vain.

CHAPTER X.

RETRIBUTION.

FINCH waited the next day, and for several days after, with a certain degree of curiosity as to what had become of his daughter, but with no great anxiety. His first thought was that she had gone off to Australia in search of her first husband. 'A good riddance to them both, if she has,' was the only comment he made upon that conjecture. When the news of what had actually happened was brought to him, he was very little moved. The reflection which depressed him most was that his

secret power over Geoffrey Clavering was henceforth gone.

But he was not the man to give up the game without a struggle.

‘He *must* do something for me all the same,’ so he concluded. ‘I will go and see that fellow Rufus Snapper. Sometimes there’s nothing like bearding the lion in his den. Mr. Snapper tried once to get me to emigrate—the idea of my beginning life all over again, in a new country, and on the principle of working hard for one’s living!’ Finch laughed heartily as he turned over this proposal in his mind. ‘While my son-in-law—I will still honour Geoffrey with that title—lives, I will live upon him. Behold my plan of life, Mr. Snapper,’ he cried, as he threw himself into a theatrical attitude, and addressed the imaginary Snapper before him. ‘It is better than *your* plan, and I have made it

answer well thus far. Now come along for the real thing.'

He waved off the fictitious Snapper, and dressed himself with care to meet the actual man. He had managed to get a suit of black at a second-hand clothing-shop, and a deep band of crape was put round his greasy hat. He took care that his countenance should be in harmony with his attire, and, thus armed at all points, he set out, full of confidence, to meet the Philadelphian.

Snapper's confidential servant opened the door, examined the stranger keenly for one moment, and then led him into a side room.

'Mr. Snapper will see you presently,' he said.

'Is anyone with him?' inquired Finch, making himself quite at home.

'I believe there is,' said the man, in

what sounded to Finch a rather peculiar tone.

‘What’s up now?’ he muttered. ‘Perhaps it would have been better if I had not written to tell him I was coming. He may be going to cut up rough, after all. Well, I must show fight—he’ll find me a toughish customer——’

‘Walk this way,’ said a voice close by his side which made Finch start.

It was only Snapper’s servant, who had quietly returned. Finch followed him into a room at the end of the passage, and found himself in the presence of the Philadelphian, who made a sign to the servant, and motioned to Finch to sit down. Any one who had known Rufus Snapper would have seen at once that he had some very serious business in hand, and meant to do it; but Finch was quite sure he had the best of the position, and surveyed the

American with his usual calm assurance.

‘You wished to see me,’ said Rufus Snapper, curtly; ‘but I must tell you that my time is brief. Is it on your own affairs that you have come?’

‘Well, not entirely,’ replied Finch, with an airy smile. ‘I should think the matter concerned others more than myself. But you shall judge presently. You have heard of my loss, I suppose?’

As he spoke, he pointed to the crape band round his hat. Snapper merely made an inclination with his head.

‘Of course—you must have seen it in the paper. There were only a few lines; I had them put in myself under the heading, “Emily Finch.” I thought perhaps you would all prefer that I did not call her by her husband’s name.’

‘Which husband do you mean?’ asked Snapper, fixing his eye upon Finch.

‘I don’t understand you!’

‘Was there anything to prevent you giving your daughter her lawful name—Mrs. Martin?’

Finch dropped his hat upon the floor, and turned very pale. He felt nervously for his pocket-handkerchief, and tried hard to rally himself from this first severe check.

‘Who is Mrs. Martin?’ he asked, making an attempt to look Snapper straight in the face, but breaking down.

The Philadelphian took up a letter from his table, to which was pinned an oblong slip of paper.

‘Do you know this handwriting?’ said he, holding the signature to the letter close enough to Finch to enable him to read it.

‘Handwriting tells so little,’ said Finch,

with a forced laugh. 'Anybody may be deceived in that.'

'Those are not bad maxims for a forger. But you know very well that this handwriting is genuine. It is your daughter's—your daughter whom you have murdered.'

'Come, that's cool!'

Finch began to recover his self-possession. If he was to be accused of murder, he felt pretty sure matters would turn out all right.

'You are to all intents and purposes her murderer, for you drove the poor creature to self-destruction. Your end ought to be the gallows.'

'I suppose in your own house it is safe enough for you to insult me. You would not dare to repeat those words anywhere else.'

Finch stood up with a menacing man-

ner; but the Philadelphian contemptuously motioned him back to his seat.

‘Sit down,’ he said, in a commanding tone. ‘I have not by any means done with you yet. Listen to what I have to say to you—it ought to interest you.’

He lit a cigarette, and resumed his own chair leisurely, and kept his eyes riveted upon Finch.

‘This letter,’ he said, keeping it in his hand, ‘is signed Emily Martin. It was written by your unhappy daughter to Geoffrey Clavering, the very day of her—her death. She describes the great fraud and wrong which was practised upon Geoffrey at your instigation; she tells him of her former marriage with one John Martin, whom we know to be still alive; and she encloses the marriage certificate. You would have no conceivable motive for forging such documents as these.’

‘How do you know John Martin is alive?’ said Finch, white and trembling.

He felt that the toils were closing round him, and that somehow he had been led into a trap.

‘Nothing could be more simple. When we received this letter, we telegraphed through the colonial agents to Australia. It took a very few days to find John Martin, and to get a message from him acknowledging the marriage. Your daughter committed bigamy, but you were the really guilty person, for at that time you could make her do anything you liked. For years you plundered Geoffrey Clavering on the strength of this false marriage; you forged his name; you levied blackmail; finally, you drove the poor woman to her death. Are you satisfied with your work?’

Finch got up again, and moved towards

the door. But Snapper ordered him back to his seat, and he obeyed like a man under a spell.

‘I have not done with you even yet,’ said the Philadelphian, with the look of a man who was shut up in a room with some offensive reptile. ‘There is another paper you must look at presently.’

‘Mr. Snapper,’ said Finch, clasping his hands together, and looking as if he had utterly collapsed, ‘let me go, and I will give no more trouble either to you or Geoffrey Clavering. Let me off this once, and I undertake you shall never see or hear of me again.’

‘So, then, you know what paper I mean?’ remarked Snapper, in the same stern voice he had spoken in throughout the interview.

‘Yes, I do,’ replied Finch, now in a panic of fear, ‘it was done only a week

ago. I thought I was sure Geoffrey would advance me a little money to-day, and then I could pay you back again. It is only twenty-five pounds. I wanted it for mourning and other expenses.'

'And so you thought you would make free with *my* name at last, having about used up everybody else's. Upon my word, I wish you had done it before, and then that poor woman might have been saved, for I should have taken care to have put you out of the way. The fact is, I am rather obliged to you than not for forging my signature. Clavering would never have prosecuted you, but I will! When you kindly announced your intention to honour me with a call, you saved me sending to your own house for you. Out of this house you never set foot a free man !'

'Spare me, Mr. Snapper!' cried the forger, almost grovelling at Snapper's feet,

‘spare me, for Geoffrey’s sake—for *her* sake. I will go anywhere you like—to the other end of the world, if necessary.’

‘To Portland will be far enough for the present,’ said Snapper, whose contempt for the forger was not diminished by the state of abject terror into which he had fallen. ‘I wonder,’ he said, looking at Finch as if he were some curious animal, ‘whether there are many more of your sort in England? We have scoundrels enough of our own at home, but I never saw such a specimen of a coward and a scoundrel knocked into one before. Why, you are green with fright, man! Get up, and let us see if you can stand.’

Finch cowered down before him, whining in almost unintelligible tones for mercy.

‘What mercy had you upon that poor boy when you got him into your power?’

What mercy had you upon your own daughter? Until this forgery upon me came to my knowledge, I thought you would have got off scot-free, and I tell you the thought made my blood boil within me. Do you think I am going to let you escape now? No, by heavens! Rather than do that, I would take the law into my own hands and fling you from that window into the street below. If the law had no hold upon you—if there were no other means of giving you your deserts—I would thrash you here and now within an inch of your life. As it is, I leave the dirty work to be done by the proper parties.’ The Philadelphian touched a bell upon his desk, and there entered a tall thin man, with a shrewd and penetrating look. ‘There he is,’ said Snapper, with a slight movement of his hand towards Finch.

‘Your name is Thomas Finch,’ said the

tall man, quietly, 'and mine is Blaker—Inspector Blaker. I suppose you will go quietly? No use making a scene, you know. Nobody does it now. Why, we don't have occasion to use *these*,' (he pulled a pair of handcuffs from his pocket as he spoke,) 'once in a twelvemonth. Mr. Snapper has liberally paid for a cab. What do you say—with or without the bracelets?'

'Without,' replied Finch, humbly, after another effort to catch Snapper's eye. 'But, first of all, will you let me say half-a-dozen words in private to this gentleman?'

The officer looked at Snapper, but saw at once that he was to go on with his business.

'Come along,' he said, in a gruff tone, as he put his hand on the forger's shoulder; 'I can't stand here all day niggling about

over you. Don't you see the gentleman is busy? Here, *this* way;' and he pushed Finch towards the door, keeping a tight grip of his wrist. 'There's a cab in the street below waiting for you—you won't get a chance of riding in one again in a hurry, so make the most of your luck.'

'May I not——'

'Come along and don't be a fool,' said the policeman, jerking him down the stairs.

Rufus Snapper watched them out of the house, and a look of quiet satisfaction came into his eyes.

'That's one unmitigated scoundrel disposed of,' said he to himself, 'and now for another. Sam Rafferty is not quite so simple a case—he is more fool than knave. And then there is his mother—I really do not like to be hard upon her.' He walked up and down the room pondering in his

mind the best method of dealing with Sam and his mother. 'She has appealed to Geoffrey too,' he thought, 'lucky thing he is out of the way. He went off the same day as the colonel, no one knows where. I daresay I shall be able to find him by-and-by. Meanwhile, suppose I go and call upon my old friend Polly? If she is a sensible woman, she will meet me a little more than half-way in this business of her precious son's. In that case I could wash my hands of the lot and clear out too. Not much good in my stopping here after they have all gone.'

He shook his head rather ruefully, for he had felt very lonely since the departure of the colonel and his daughter, and then, after a little further reflection, he made up his mind to go and see Sam's mother at her favourite hotel near Piccadilly.

The widow was installed in very com-

fortable quarters, and looked younger than ever as the Philadelphian advanced towards her. Anxiety or care might have troubled her more or less at various times, but they left no trace upon her smooth and unruffled face.

‘What an age since we met,’ she said, in her soft, pleasant voice—‘and under what different circumstances! *Then* I was in great trouble about my son—it all seems so absurd now. How could I ever have supposed that he was even remotely connected with poor Mr. Clavering’s death? I was like one in a dream the whole time—my great affliction fell so suddenly upon me. But you, Mr. Snapper—surely you did not believe my son to be involved in that awful affair?’

‘I must admit that I did, at one time,’ replied Snapper, looking down, for he inwardly felt rather ashamed of having been

duped by his own theories of the murder. 'Consider that threat I heard him utter—his desperate position—his dangerous associates——'

'His associates!' repeated the widow, with a heavy sigh. 'They have been the cause of all his misfortunes. If I could but find out even now what was the real difficulty he was in when I last saw him! There was something very wrong, and he even spoke of running away. From what? From whom? Mr. Snapper, you have been very kind to me—' here her voice faltered a little, and the tears stood in her eyes. They were genuine tears, too, for Snapper's reticence about her past, and his habitual forbearance towards her, had won her gratitude and touched her heart. 'You have always been very kind to me, and I know that I may safely confide in you. I was afraid my son knew something about

that awful night's work at Porthcawl Castle, and that he was in peril. When I expressed my fears to him, he only confirmed them, and spoke of it being necessary to purchase the silence of another. What did he mean? I entreat you to tell me !'

' Did you give him the money he asked for ?'

' I did not, for he has deceived me so often that I could not trust him again.'

' And you have not seen him since ?'

' Never. I have been in dread every day that some dreadful exposure was hanging over my head, and even now I am uneasy. What has he done? Is he in any danger of—of——'

' Of the law ?' put in Snapper.

' Yes—since we must speak plainly.'

' It is better, or else we shall not get at what you ought to know. The really un-

fortunate man in all this affair—apart from the murder, of course—is Geoffrey Clavering. A more unfortunate family than these Claverings I never saw. We need not speak of the father, but see what has happened to the son! He has for years and years been the victim of a pitiless adventurer, who robbed him without mercy, and entrapped him into a false marriage.'

'What was this man's name?' asked the widow, eagerly.

'Thomas Finch.'

'I thought as much,' she said, leaning back in her chair, as if she were faint.

'And your son—you had better hear the truth from me now—has been only too closely connected with him. They were in a sort of partnership together. One forged cheques, and the other passed them. The name which Finch preferred to use

was Geoffrey Clavering, but there were others. He paid me the compliment of borrowing mine lately, and I am very much indebted to him for it. That alone has enabled me to bring him to book, for I am afraid Geoffrey would never have prosecuted him, especially now that the poor woman, his daughter, has confessed everything, and repaired her wrong-doing, so far as lay in her power.'

'And you say my son was a party to these forgeries?' said the widow, who apparently had heard nothing else.

'Beyond a doubt. It would be useless to conceal the truth from you now. He had admitted it to me, and Finch has told me all the circumstances.'

The Philadelphian paused for a moment as if he were considering some knotty point, and then he continued:

'You are a countrywoman of mine, and

I feel bound to stand by you, so far as I can. I should be sorry to see disgrace brought upon you—here, in a foreign country too—by your son. There is only one thing to be done—let him get away as soon as he can. I may perhaps be able to save him if he does that, but he must make up his mind quickly, or rather you must make it up for him, for he has no mind of his own. That is why he fell so easily into Finch's hands. Tell him from me that he is a lost man if he does not make tracks out of this country within forty-eight hours.'

'But this man Finch,' said the widow, greatly agitated, 'will he not accuse him?'

'At any rate, let him go away. It is now Thursday—get him off by Saturday. Send for him to get off at once—I will give you his address presently—and repeat to him what I have told you. Tell him

that I know all, and that for the sake of his mother I wish to spare him. Take him to New York yourself, and then get him off to Texas or Mexico. It is the only chance. He will not go unless you look after him. You can easily return, if you wish to do so. If you like, I will meet you at Liverpool on Saturday. That is one plan.'

'What is the other?'

The widow evidently shrank from the first proposal.

'He will have to travel on the road Thomas Finch has gone,' replied Snapper, quietly. 'For my part, if I had the choice, I should prefer the Cunarder.'

The widow covered her face with her hands for a moment or two, but, when she removed them, she was composed and calm, though somewhat pale. There was a hard look in her eyes, and a firm expres-

sion about her mouth, which showed Snapper at once that she intended to take his advice.

‘I can never be sufficiently grateful to you,’ she said, holding out both her hands to the Philadelphian; ‘you have been very generous to me, and I can only thank you in my poor way. As for my unhappy son, he will thank you too, I hope, some day when he has shaken off all these evil influences. Depend upon it, everything shall be done as you suggest. I will never leave him till he is on board the steamer. You know where he is staying—to his shame, be it said, his mother does not.’

Snapper handed her a card on which an address was written.

‘Very well,’ said the widow, ‘I will go to him at once. He shall know all that you have said.’

‘Not forgetting that I will come to bid

him good-bye on Saturday,' interposed Snapper, in a significant tone.

'He shall understand. We shall meet on Saturday—I will not say farewell till then.'

She held his hand a moment in her own, and the Philadelphian felt more determined than ever to save the son for the mother's sake.

CHAPTER XI.

TOWARDS THE SOUTH.

WHEN Colonel Pendleton and his daughter arrived in New York, they felt themselves as strangers in a strange land. There were few familiar faces to be seen; fewer still to smile upon them a kindly greeting. The colonel's way of life had never brought him into contact with 'bosses,' and any newspaper-boy who ran through the cars, shouting out his wares, would have been a far better authority on the ruling politicians of the hour than the Virginian. For some

years after the war, every southern gentleman was driven out of public life; the negroes were practically the masters. That era still existed when the ex-Confederate soldier had gone abroad, and the very recollection of it had made him unwilling to hear or read a word about politics. He was aware that the days of negro rule were ended, and that civilization had again triumphed over semi-barbarism, but the new men who had risen to power were entirely unknown to him. All he cared for was to get back to his home again, and to be allowed to end his days there in peace.

But it was found that the old homestead could not be made ready to receive its master without some delay, and therefore the colonel decided to go to Saratoga, which, before the war, was a favourite summer retreat for Southerners. Colonel Pendle-

ton had not been there since 1860, and he found it, like everything else, a good deal changed. After a time he stumbled upon an old acquaintance or two, and, as Edith seemed amused with the place, he lingered on until the season neared its close. By that time, four months had passed since they left England.

For Edith Pendleton they had not been eventless months. Her beauty, her refinement, the mingled gaiety and innocence of her manners marked her out from the throng of ordinary belles who make Saratoga popular, and who have added more to its prosperity than the much-vaunted springs. But for these fair syrens, the other sex would often feel inclined to content themselves with the 'waters of Pharpar and Damascus,' and refuse to make the pilgrimage to Saratoga.

It happened to be a particularly ani-

mated season the year of the colonel's return, and his heart grew lighter as he saw his daughter entering into its pleasures. She had been depressed when they took their departure from England, and for some time afterwards health occasioned her father no little concern. But youth carries with it its own restorative. Edith saw New York and Philadelphia for the first time; her father was careful to show her the house of their faithful friend, Rufus Snapper. The same night she sat down to her desk, and wrote a long and affectionate letter to Snapper, which that gentleman received in due season with no little emotion. For Edith told him that the one drawback to her happiness was his absence, and urged him to join them quickly. From Philadelphia they had gone to Saratoga, and there Colonel Pendleton would have been blind indeed

if he had not seen that his daughter was attracting the respectful homage of more than one young American, whose capture would have been considered a grand *coup* by the astutest mothers then ranged on the field of action.

One of these aspirants to Edith Pendleton's good graces was the son of a New York broker, whose name was well known all over the country. He was wealthy, and would be still wealthier a few years hence; he was decidedly good-looking; nothing was known against his character. For several weeks this model young gentleman was assiduous in his attentions to the colonel's daughter, and then one day he disappeared. The colonel asked no questions, but in his heart he felt a little sorry for the New Yorker.

Not very long after this incident, a stranger called upon the colonel, and pre-

sented him with a letter of introduction from an old friend at Washington—Senator Pinckney. The stranger was Count Petrehoff, of the Russian Legation, and in the course of a few days he had placed himself on excellent terms with the Southerner and his daughter. There was a courtly grace about his manners, and a wide knowledge of the world visible in his conversation, as well as a rich natural fund of wit, which could not fail to render him an agreeable companion. He was observed to pay marked attention to Miss Pendleton, but American young ladies enjoy perfect freedom, and never abuse it. It seemed quite certain that the Russian would turn out to be one of the numerous foreigners who are destined to surrender to American beauty. But one morning he went quietly to the colonel, and had a little conversation with him, and presently

bade him adieu with a very sorrowful demeanour.

‘We shall have the whole place depopulated presently,’ said the colonel to his daughter, as they sat together that evening on one of the spacious verandahs of the hotel. ‘All the really pleasant young men are going away.’

‘What has happened to them?’ enquired Edith, with a touch of shyness.

‘I cannot tell,’ replied the colonel, with an innocent air, ‘it is a sort of epidemic, I think. First there was young Barker—he went away looking none the better for his visit. Now there is Count Petrehoff. Upon my word, if the casualties increase at this rate, we shall soon find ourselves in the papers. You will be interviewed, Edith, and your portrait will be in the *Sunday Roarer*.’

‘It is not my fault, papa.’

‘No. I suppose it is only their misfortune, poor fellows! All the same, I am sorry the count has gone away.’

‘Why was he not content to remain a friend, instead of getting nonsense into his head?’

‘Well, he did not realise that it was nonsense—at first. By-the-by, I received a letter from Mr. Snapper just before we went in to dinner. Where could I have put it?’

The colonel pretended to feel in all his pockets, but kept a shrewd eye upon his daughter all the while. As he had anticipated, he saw her listless manner change suddenly to one of great eagerness.

‘A letter? Well, but, papa, where is it—what does it say?’

‘How can I tell without reading it? I

told you that it came just before dinner ;
I was too hungry to open it then.'

'The idea of being hungry, papa, when
you have a letter from Mr. Snapper to
read.'

'Yes, it is curious, but old habits cling
to one. I get hungry, and, when I am
hungry, I find that a letter goes no way at
all. So I preferred this time to eat my
dinner.'

'But there may be something in it of
great importance.'

'About whom?'

'About—oh, about everybody, papa.
How tiresome you are to-night. Where is
the letter—when will you read it?'

'I should like to smoke this cigar first,'
said the colonel, calmly.

'Will you let me read it to you?'

'How can I do that when there may be

secrets in it about—about everybody, as you say?’

‘I will go and get it,’ cried Edith, half laughing, half vexed.

‘You will not have far to go, for it is here in my breast pocket.’ But the colonel did not take it out ; he only kept on slowly puffing at his cigar.

‘Oh, what a time it takes you to smoke a cigar.’

‘Well, now, you try one, and see if you can get through it any faster. That poor Russian——’

‘Never mind the Russian, papa.’

‘But I *do* mind him ; he gave me a cigarette the other day which was so good that I meant to ask him where he got them. Now if you had not sent him away——’

‘Well, what would have happened?’

‘Why, I should have smoked good cig-

arettes the rest of my days instead of bad ones. Young ladies never consider these things.'

'I will consider them in future if you will only read this letter.'

'Agreed—come along then to that quiet corner, under the light. Now for this budget of wonders.'

The colonel began to read Snapper's letter in a low voice, but not a word was lost upon his daughter.

'“Here we are, my dear Pendleton, in a little nook on one of the Italian lakes—out of the way of the tourists, and in the way of all the lovely scenery. We are a little party—Geoffrey Clavering, a friend of his, and myself. We made up our minds to come here all in a hurry—the fact is, Clavering seemed a good deal out of sorts, and I thought a change would do him good. He has been in a dull and mopish kind of

way ever since that—well, I suppose you can fix the date about as well as I can. The young fellow broods too much, and has a worn look that I do not much like.””

The colonel paused a moment, and looked at his daughter. She was very silent, and presently he continued :

““Clavering went off with his friend in a boat an hour ago, and left me here eating figs. I am of opinion that nobody ever tasted such figs as these since Adam and Eve got into that muddle, and were turned out of the great fig-garden. What a good time they must have had of it, those two ! But it didn't last very long—that is one consolation for us poor creatures, who so seldom have a good time. I imitate them as well as I can by eating figs all day ; relays of waiters are nearly always on the stairs carrying them to my room. Of

course you saw all that story in the paper I sent you about that poor woman, Finch's daughter—Mrs. Clavering, as she called herself.” ’

“ “ As she called herself,” ’ repeated Edith Pendleton, pale and trembling.

‘ It is what he says—but what paper he means I have not the least idea. Nothing of the kind has ever reached me.’

‘ Go on, papa.’

The young girl drew a thin shawl around her as if she were cold, the colonel took up the letter which he had laid upon his knee.

“ “ It seems,” he read, “ that her right name *was* Mrs. Martin, after all—she was married long before she knew Geoffrey, and her husband is still alive. We have a certificate of her marriage, and I have found out her husband. That ruffian Finch deserves hanging—his daughter's death ought to be

laid at his door. As it is, he will get off with a dose of penal servitude.”’

‘It is odd,’ said the colonel, ‘that we never heard how the poor creature died. There must be a letter of Snapper’s missing, or perhaps he meant the paper to tell us everything. You know how unwilling he is to write—this is only the second letter we have had since we left England.’

‘What else does he say, papa?’

‘Let me see—ah, here it is. “Finch went off a fortnight or so ago in a big van with V.R. on it—quite a grand affair. He is to be taken care of by V.R., or some one else, for twenty years, so that we are not likely to be troubled with *him* much more. His companion, Rafferty, ought to have been in the big carriage with him, but to tell you the truth I managed to get him out of the way. For a wonder, Finch said nothing about him on the trial, and no one

else did. Sam's mother would have broken her heart if he had been sent to prison, so it was necessary to save him, if possible, and it turned out to be possible.

“That's all, I believe. I can tell you anything I may have forgotten when I see you, which will be some time in December. This friend of young Clavering's—an artist—wants very much to see Virginia. May I bring him with me for a short visit? He will soon be going on further south.” The idea of Rufus Snapper asking permission to bring anyone to my house is rather droll,’ remarked the colonel, with a smile. ‘All the same, I wonder who Geoffrey's friend is? Perhaps the president of the Royal Academy.’

‘Is there nothing more in the letter, papa?’

‘Well, not much—a short message from Geoffrey himself.’

‘ From Geoffrey !’

As the young girl spoke, she stretched out her hand involuntarily towards the letter. Her father shook his head, and began to read again :

“ Clavering begged me when I wrote to give all sorts of kind remembrances to you and Edith. He is never tired of talking about you, and frequently says, ‘ Can they ever forgive me ?’ When I answer ‘ yes,’ he seems by no means satisfied. I wish some one with more authority than I possess could whisper the magic word in his ear.”

The colonel folded up the letter, and put it in his pocket.

‘ Some one else,’ said he ; ‘ he means me, I suppose.’

‘ No doubt papa,’ replied Edith, now smiling in her turn.

‘ But why should he want me to say yes ?’

‘ Because he thinks it would come better from you, I suppose.’

Father and daughter looked at each other for a moment, and then the colonel slowly rose.

‘ Let us go indoors,’ said he, ‘ it is getting late—and see, the sky is becoming quite clear again. The storm-clouds are gone, and we are going to have fine weather after all. We will start to-morrow for home!’

The girl said nothing, but drew nearer to her father, and somehow both felt as if a great load had been lifted from their hearts.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY.

THE Pendleton homestead began to resume its old-time aspect soon after the return of the colonel and his daughter. The house had been well taken care of by Uncle Brutus and his wife, both of whom had been slaves on the estate, but had refused to leave the colonel when slavery was abolished. Uncle Brutus was in the prime of life when he was made a free man, and he might easily have obtained employment elsewhere; but his father had lived

under the colonel's father, and he made up his mind that in the place where he was born there also he would die, unless his master actually drove him away.

‘I’s black,’ he said to his wife, when he came to this conclusion, ‘but I’m not gwine to run away from the massa jes’ becoss all the others go. De likes ob dem may do it, for they’re nothin’ but low darkeys; but I’ve allus lived in this yer house like one of the quality themselves. I’ve known the Kunnel ever since he was a little boy, and now we’ll stan’ by him, so long as he’ll let us.’

And thus it happened that Brutus and his wife, Cynthy, kept watch and guard over the house and the fields round about it, while the rest of the estate was sold. Much of it had gone before the colonel knew how well his half-forgotten investments in the north had prospered; but

there remained enough to form a very comfortable property. Groves of pine-trees flourished all round the house, and fruits grew in such abundance that even in former years, when the place had been full of guests, there had always been more than anybody could find a use for.

Edith Pendleton was delighted with everything—the house was not so grand or so ancient as Porthcawl Castle, but its quaint rooms had an attraction of their own, and there was a charm about the spot which belongs only to the place where those of our kith and kin have lived for generations before us.

‘They wanted to persuade me I should be very dull and lonely when I came back here, Cynthy,’ said she to the old negro woman who had nursed her in her infancy, and who had been considerably astonished

to see what a fine handsome young lady her baby had grown into.

Edith's resemblance to her mother always excited a slightly superstitious feeling in Cynthy's mind. As the girl stood talking to her, the old woman pushed her great horn-rimmed spectacles on to her forehead, and looked hard and curiously at her.

'My sakes!' she exclaimed, 'what a tall lady you've growed to, and so handsome! Ah, you needn't look so blushified; if Aunt Cynthy hasn't a right to tell you the truth, I should like to know who has? Bress her heart. 'Clar! I didn't know you when I fust seed you, n' more did my ole man; but now it kinder seems ez ef you'd never gone away. Sometimes we were afeard we should never see yer no mo', mistis, but, if yer wait de Lo'd's

time, he allus makes everythin' right, and so he brought you and Mars Kunnel home again.'

'And we don't intend to go away any more. Now listen to me, Aunt Cynthy! Next week we shall be having some people from Richmond, and, above all, there are two friends of ours coming from England.'

'Yes, honey, I heerd der's a right smart sprinklin' of grand white folks comin' up.'

'And we must take great care of them all,' said Edith, coaxingly, for the old woman evidently disapproved of strangers. 'We must see that my father's friend, Mr. Snapper, goes away with a good opinion of the Shenandoah Valley. He is a Northerner.'

'Poor trash!' muttered Aunt Cynthy; but Edith thought it wise not to hear her. 'Dis ole nigger's not so peart as she

was,' said the old woman, slowly relaxing under the influence of Edith's smile, 'but she'll do all you want, young mistis, nebber fear. My ole man can work—he's a sight younger now 'n mos' folks of his age. He kin work ez hard ez ever he used ter when he's got somefin to do to please Mars Kunnel. I ain't seen him so spry dis many a day as he is dis year. Oh, don't you fear, honey. Ebberythin' will be set right long 'fore de white folks come.'

For the rest of the week there was great bustling about inside the house, and almost as much outside, Cynthy running after the other servants day and night, while Uncle Brutus was going over to the station for mysterious parcels which had been ordered from Richmond or Baltimore. At length he came hobbling in one morning at a gait which seemed perilously fast for him, and

announced that there was a carriage coming up the road, far below the house, 'with two gemmen in it.'

'Rufus Snapper and his friend the artist,' said the colonel, jumping up—'you see they have been as good as their words.' He and his daughter went upon the verandah and looked out, and saw the heavy old coach slowly toiling up the hill. 'They would not let us know when they intended to come, and so we could not send for them,' said the colonel, in a dissatisfied tone; 'they must have been at least an hour in that ramshackle thing, and will be nearly half-an-hour more before they get to the top of the hill. I believe I will go down to meet them.'

And, even as he uttered the words, he caught up his hat and stick, and was off. When he had gone half-way down the hill, his daughter saw an eager waving of hands

from the coach, responded to by her father, and then the whole party was lost to view in a bend of the road.

Rufus Snapper had written to his friends but once since they heard from him at Saratoga, and that last letter had been pronounced thoroughly unsatisfactory. For it contained little about those in whom father and daughter were especially interested—a word or two about Snapper himself, a passing allusion to Geoffrey Clavering who was still abroad. ‘He will tell us all about it when he comes,’ the colonel had said, feeling confident that something remained to be told, but endeavouring to conceal his apprehensions from his daughter. By degrees, Geoffrey’s name receded more and more into the background, but the man himself was seldom absent from their thoughts many days together.

Edith's room was not in front of the house but the noise and bustle of the arrival of the party reached her, and a little while afterwards she heard her father's voice outside her door, calling her gently. She went out, and he took her by the hand, and she noticed that a peculiar smile was on his face—a smile she had not seen for a long time, in spite of his satisfaction at returning to his own home. He took her by the hand, and, when he said 'there is a great surprise for you,' she turned pale for a moment, but then a glad light came into her eye and she hurried the colonel forward.

The two visitors were in the hall standing close to the open fireplace, in which some hickory logs were blazing cheerfully. The strangers had not at first heard her step, but the colonel felt the pressure of her hand tighter as they both turned round, and revealed one of the persons she expected—

Rufus Snapper. The other stood somewhat in the shadow, so that at first she could not see his face.

Snapper stepped forward and led her to the stranger.

‘Here,’ said he, in his usual matter-of-fact way, ‘is some one you know, who has done nothing but talk about you ever since you saw him last. I did not dare to venture into Virginia alone, and as my artist friend could not come after all—threw me over at the last moment—I took the liberty of bringing Geoffrey himself. You are not angry?’ he added, in a lower voice, audible only to Edith.

She replied only by a look, but it amply satisfied Rufus Snapper. Then she went up to Geoffrey and shook hands with him as an old friend might do—as her father had already done. Snapper slipped away, but the other three stood talking together for

some time. Before the first evening had passed over, the shadows of Porthcawl Castle had almost faded from the mind of the long-absent heir.

There was so much to do, and so many places to see of which Snapper and Claver-
ing had read or heard, that the days slipped by almost imperceptibly. The colonel and his younger guest frequently went out shooting, or for long rides together, and it was very clear to Snapper that the affectionate friendship which had always existed between them grew closer every day.

‘There is no getting hold of Clavering,’ he remarked one day to the colonel. ‘He is always with you or with Edith. It’s all the same so far as I am concerned.’

‘Are you being neglected, Rufus?’

‘Oh, I don’t mind it. It’s well enough as it is. I am very glad to see the young

fellow in better spirits again. Old stagers like you and I, colonel, must expect to be down in the dumps sometimes ; but it is unnatural in the young. Since Clavering has been here, he has brightened up in a very curious way ; it must be the influence of your society, colonel—mine never had the same effect upon him.'

'Yes, my cheerful companionship does it all,' said the colonel, with a cheerful nod.

'Well, I'm glad I have found out what it is, for I was just going to ask Edith to explain it. Have you noticed that Geoffrey is more devoted to our little girl than ever? Watch him whenever she leaves the room ; you would think that the world had come to an end so far as he was concerned. Perhaps you do not notice it—fathers, I believe, never see anything.'

‘ So I have always understood,’ said the colonel, taking a seat on the stump of an old tree.

‘ Well, there is no mistake about it—none whatever. When you see a young man heavy and stupid away from a certain person, and bright and gay *with* that person, it needs no conjuror to tell you what’s in the wind.’

‘ You seem to know the symptoms pretty well, Rufus, for a man who has never had the complaint.’

‘ How do you know I’ve never had it?’ responded the Philadelphian, briskly.

‘ Well, it didn’t come to much, anyhow.’

‘ No, because as soon as the thing began to get a tight hold of me I ran away. You must treat it as you do the cholera—keep on moving away from it. Now, our friend Clavering is not acting upon this principle,

and therefore you will find that he will succumb. But I admit he has ten times more excuse than ever I had.'

'He came to me yesterday,' said the colonel, in a low, serious tone, 'and spoke to me in a very frank and manly way about my girl. He has acted well—as I should have expected.'

'And what did you tell him?'

'My dear Snapper, what *could* I tell him except that I should not interfere? You know my mind on that subject—Edith shall be entirely free. There have been many sad circumstances, but I see nothing to make me distrust Geoffrey Clavering. We know the worst that is to be said.'

'I am sure we do,' said Snapper, emphatically.

'And, that being so, I shall let everything alone. I will not say a single word

to influence Edith in his favour—nor the other way.’

‘Then I shall go back alone.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Why, our friend here will never return until his fate is decided, and that may take time. I will leave him here; love will not keep our paper-mill going, and I have been away from it some time. Do not say a word to him or to Edith; some morning I will leave early, and no one need know anything about it. Let these young folk settle matters in their own way. You agree?’

‘Yes—I agree, for the present.’

‘The present is all I care about; by-and-by will take care of itself. Now I’m going to have a talk with that simpleton of an old negro, who wouldn’t be free when he had the chance. I will try to convert him

even now—perhaps he will pack up his traps and follow me, and taste the pleasures of freedom.’

But Snapper’s eloquence was apparently lost upon Uncle Brutus ; at any rate, he remained on the old plantation. One day the Philadelphian himself did not make his appearance at the dinner-table ; there was a note to Edith Pendleton instead, explaining that he had been called away on urgent business. The young girl was unusually grave that evening, and Clavering fancied that she tried to avoid being alone with him. It was the same next day, and the day after that ; Clavering’s spirits fell below zero. An excursion had been planned a few miles up the valley, and it occurred to Clavering as he set out with his host and daughter that he might possibly be about to take his last expedition of this

kind in Virginia. There was a downcast look upon his face which the colonel did not fail to notice, but he made no remark. The journey, which was to the house of an old comrade of the colonel's, seemed rather long to all the party, but the visit roused them from their thoughts, and, when they set out to walk part of the way home, Edith Pendleton seemed lighter of heart than she had been since the memorable day of Mrs. Martin's visit to Porthcawl.

The colonel and his Confederate companion-in-arms were in the midst of some absorbing reminiscences when they left the house, and for a little while the younger people walked on alone together. Edith related some curious anecdotes of her father's friend, who had lived in a large house entirely by himself ever since the war, and there had been a great deal of

quiet fun and pleasant talk, when there suddenly came upon the young girl's face the same pre-occupied expression which Clavering had noticed there so often. Once or twice she looked back on the road for her father, who was not far behind, and there was a silence. Clavering could endure all this suspense no longer.

‘Have I offended you, Edith?’ he asked, in a voice which he could not quite control.

She looked at him surprised, but in a moment her eyes fell again, and she answered by shaking her head.

‘I have been so happy since I came here,’ continued Clavering, ‘that it has made me selfish. The day I arrived, I felt like a man who had escaped from some terrible doom, and all at once finds himself surrounded by everything he had wished

for in the world. And now, perhaps, I have outstayed my welcome.'

'You must not think that. Papa was saying only this morning that he wished you would remain with us till the spring.'

'But your answer to him—*that* you keep secret. Perhaps it is better that I should not know it.'

'Papa will tell you, I daresay,' said the young girl, with a spice of mischief.

'I should be afraid to ask him. But, if I am to go away, I must first tell you the truth about myself. You will let me do that, for the sake of our old friendship. No one would begrudge me my happiness here who knew the life I had been leading for many a month past. I have had but one thought to console me ever since I saw you last—it was that you had forgiven me.'

'Long ago, Geoffrey,' said Edith, in a low and earnest tone.

‘It was like your generous nature to do so! But, Edith, that is not all. If only I dared hope for something more than forgiveness—if I could believe that the past might be completely obliterated——’

‘That is never possible, I think, Geoffrey,’ she replied, half sadly.

‘Perhaps not—but at least I should like to think that it might be possible for me to make some amends for the pain I have caused you. The devotion of all the rest of my life would be far too little to give for that purpose! I may not have an opportunity of speaking thus with you again—I must tell you all, even at the risk of saying that which will part us for ever.’

‘Why do you keep on talking of going away?’ said the young girl, with a smile which made Geoffrey’s heart beat fast.

‘I cannot remain without telling you again what I told you long ago—that I

love you better than my own existence—better than all the rest of the world besides! You, and you only—it has always been the same. I deserve reproach, I know full well, but you have never reproached me, and now I come to you feeling more than ever that there is no more happiness for me if I cannot prevail upon you to forgive me utterly.’

‘But I have forgiven you.’

‘And is that all, Edith?’

‘It is all you have asked,’ said the young girl, with her old mischievous look.

‘You know what I wish to ask—it is that you will let me love you as I have always done, that I may take you to my home again—the home where you have a right to be—as my wife. It was that hope which led me here——’.

‘You did not come to please Mr. Snapper,

then,' she said; and somehow her hand found its way into Geoffrey's.

They were so occupied with each other, that they did not hear the colonel's step until he stood close beside them. His friend had turned back.

'I have just been forgiving Geoffrey,' said Edith, with an odd look which made both men laugh.

'What, again?' replied the colonel, evidently delighted.

'He would not be satisfied unless I did.'

'Well, is he satisfied now?'

'She has made me the happiest man in the world,' said Clavering, as they turned their faces homeward.

They came to a long, dark, strange-looking ridge running all across a field—a ridge covered with rank, luxuriant grass,

and a wild growth of weeds and tangle. The eyes of all three were attracted towards it, as if it had exercised some spell upon them.

‘Beneath that ridge,’ said the colonel, as they drew up almost involuntarily before it, ‘nearly a thousand brave fellows found their last resting-place. They fell like leaves around this spot, spilling their lives as water, dying for their country and the cause they loved. It was all in vain. I knew many of them—fine, manly young fellows, full of courage and daring. This was the end of it all—this sad field!’

The sun threw its last rays upon the trench, covering it for a few minutes with a celestial light, which faded quickly away into the swiftly coming night of a Virginian December—fit emblem of the broken lives which here lay shattered. How many

mothers had waited for their sons, and wives for their husbands, unconscious that the loved ones were sleeping beneath this sod.

Edith and Geoffrey gazed upon it, and the sacred influence of a spot consecrated by so much valour and so many tears sank deep into their hearts. At length they turned from it, not without sorrow, nor yet without a brighter and a happier feeling, for the tragedy which had been enacted on these fields was of the past, while they were going forward to a new life; and upon the horizon of the young there is perpetual sunshine, for all things are possible, or seem to be so, and death is distant, and trouble is but a name heard in a dream.

THE END.

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